

A Reunion at the Lazarus Parable

Colleagues,

I got my come-uppance this past Sunday. A prominent ELCA pastor introduced me to a friend of his after the Sunday service of the congregation he pastors as: “Ed Schroeder, heresy-hunter.” That was a surprise. [Marie thought she should’ve told him that “Gospel-sniffer” was more accurate. By then it was too late. Win some; lose some.]

A bit of background. This past weekend the Schroeder clan gathered “back at the farm” for the 13th biennial gathering of the descendents of my grandparents, Friederich and Augusta (Taube) Schroeder. Both of them came from Germany as teenagers with their families in the 1880s. Their German Lutheran Missouri Synod connections in separate congregations around the Quad-Cities (Iowa and Illinois) led them to each other and to marriage and to the Schroeder farm in Coal Valley, Illinois—and to 14 children! The third in line of those kids was my father Heinrich.

With that many in the first born-in-America generation it will come as no surprise that 140 folks showed up for the 3-day festivities. And that’s only a fraction of what the computerized clan genealogists (son Nathan prominent among them) have on their data bases.

Since the Wars of Missouri in the 1970s, going to church on reunion Sunday is dicey. In ancient days we’d all go to Trinity LCMS in Coal Valley IL—the church that grandpa helped build. But ELCAers aren’t eligible for communion at Trinity even if you were baptized and confirmed there. That agonizes some of the

goldie-oldies—more often the LCMS Schroeders who say “Why can’t you ELCAers come to Trinity nevertheless—in memory of grandma and grandpa?” As some of you may suspect, the three generations that have now come after my own are less fastidious about such matters. And for some “going to church” at all is an adiaphoron.

So we attended the ELCA congregation last Sunday—biggest one in the Quad-Cities—where a 10-million-dollar building expansion is just getting underway. The guest preacher, a seminary professor, used the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus [Luke 16:19ff.] as his sermon text. And neither his sermon, nor any other element of the service, signalled any awareness of the “great gulf fixed” between the building cranes outside the nave windows and the point of the parable. Neither “Moses and the prophets” nor the “ONE resurrected from the dead,” the Jesus who originally spoke the parable, got much of a hearing. Or so it seemed to me. But then that’s what you expect from a heresy-hunter.

The preacher did get to level D-1 and D-2 in his diagnosis. And did so compellingly. All of us there in the congregation—preacher and people—were clearly in the Rich Man’s robes and not in Lazarus’ rags. We had HMOs to attend to our sores, and dogs only as pets. Crumbs from the table? Even our dogs don’t eat crumbs. Crumbs have never been our daily bread.

Yes, and it was even worse than that. Go to D-2. It was hardness of heart, blindness and deafness that was so ingrained that we do not (cannot?) see the wretched and hear their cries.

He articulated both of these masterfully—introducing us to faith-siblings he worked with in Central America who are Lazarus at our door today for D-1 crossovers. Likewise for D-2 crossings he drew parallels to our standard operating procedures (even in our churches) showing the interior sickness of heart that

nourishes such behavior in Lazarus-by-passers-[hereafter LBP].

And then he brought in Jesus. But it was too soon.

For the Jesus “necessary” to heal this much of our dilemma is Jesus the example, the instructor, even the critic telling us, yes shouting: “YOU’RE NOT DOING WHAT I TOLD YOU TO DO!” Isn’t that just a new Moses? Even to have him say: “Look, I even died for you. Now go and do thou likewise” is not really Gospel. [Yes, this is acting like a narcotics-trained dog, “sniffing” for the Gospel.] Pointing to his crucifixion—for all of us LBPs—as paradigm for what we too should do is not yet preaching THE Gospel. It’s “using” Christ for ethics without “using” him for his own primary, and primal, agenda, his “opus proprium” in Lutheran confessional lingo. That primal agenda arises at the God-and-LBP interface.

But to get to that primal use of Christ, you have to go to that “coram deo” interface, the jugular of what the dilemma is. Which I didn’t hear from Sunday’s preacher. That’s D-3 (diagnosis level three): the deepest malady of all LBPs is their (our) God-problem.

Back to the parable. Long before LBP wound up in Hades there was “a great gulf fixed” between him and God’s turf, the place where Abraham’s at home. [Btw, “Lazarus” (Lo-azar in Hebrew) is “no help.” I.e., not only that he can’t help himself, but also that he GETS “no help” from us LBPs.] The chasm twixt LBPs and God is indeed unbridgeable—at least from our side. All LBPs are “no-help” for themselves, nor for others, to span that gap. But we can, and are, blinded by this ultimate fact of life. Only from the end in retrospect did it become perfectly clear for LBP in Hades. Whereupon it’s too late. Then LBP pleads for mercy. But he didn’t live by mercy before, so why now? Merciless living before the end equals the same for the hereafter.

Jesus puts into the story a line about “Moses and the prophets.” Not that Moses and the prophets can bridge the gap either. But when read “unveiled” (as St. Paul notes) they make that chasm perfectly clear. If you don’t “listen to Moses and the prophets,” you won’t have a clue about the chasm. And thus the One raised from the dead, this Lazarus-like Jesus, will be of no interest to you. Not really “necessary.” And if/when you do “listen to them” while you are living, you’ll also start your mercy-plea while you’re yet alive. “God, be merciful to me a sinner” is the full text. And to such a plea, the God of the Bible is notoriously attentive. He actually initiates chasm-crossing. That’s what the Jesus story is all about.

Had the preacher taken us to this depth diagnosis of our own LBP malady, he’d have had US pleading too for God’s mercy. And then he could have really gossiped us. The Jesus that came “too soon” in the sermon would now be “necessitated” as the Lutheran Confessions like to say. Necessitated as no one else could be—one who has entered Hades in his own death and risen from that death in triumph over it. That means triumph over the God-gap, the chasm that is the bottom-line torment of all LBPs.

That also means “necessitated” according to the specs of the “double dipstick” of Apology 4 in the Lutheran Confessions—1) using Christ for the big job that he alone can do—call it forgiveness—getting God and sinners together again in friendship across that chasm, and 2) giving us tormented LBPs the comfort and confidence that our God-gap is bridged. Which then gives us the courage to be Christ’s own little Lazaruses—helpless helpers, wounded healers—living from mercy as the new-breath we inhale, and exuding that same mercy as the odor and fragrance of our daily journey.

The primal use of the Gospel always aims to bridge the God-gap.

The second use of the Gospel bridges the Lazarus-gap.

It's the grammar of Gospel-imperatives: SINCE Christ became God's Lazarus for us, THEREFORE you be his Lazarus to the Lazaruses in your world.

And remember the LBPs are the ones most help-less, really "Lo-azar." They need big help. But that help is here. His name is Jesus.

Real heresy is to keep LBPs ignorant of the big help they need, and then to feed them an emaciated Jesus for the shallow diagnosis. In this sense Gospel-sniffer and heresy-hunter may be synonyms.

Isn't this depth diagnosis and resurrection resource exactly what Luke's Jesus is telling us in this parable? What else could be better news than Christ the God-gap-spanner? And that good news could make a congregation gutsy enough to take maybe just half of their 10 million dollars and give it to some Lazarus Foundation. Imagine who all would benefit from that, both among the LBPs and the obvious Lo-azar types! Imagine how many chasms—yes how many of the BIG ones, the D-3s – might be bridged!

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Gnosticism and Legalism

Colleagues,

ThTh #423, the posting 2 weeks ago, “Tranquebar Tercentenary Celebration – Ziegenbalg Arrives in India 1706” concluded:

“Whether in goatskin [Ziegen-balg] or camelskin [John the Baptist] the real legacy was the same: ‘Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.’”

After I shipped it off, I kept thinking about that last sentence. Specifically with reference to the Hindu world that Ziegenbalg entered on July 9, 1706. No Hindu sage, so far as I know, even in the wide denominational diversity of Hinduism, would ever say that about any human—or divine—figure. No third party can un-sin sinners. Sinners have to purge themselves of their own sins—or at the very least, do SOMETHING. And the manifold smorgasbord of sacrifices and disciplines available in Hinduism is the toolkit for getting un-sinned. That was what we learned in our three-month mission-stint (granted, that’s not very long) among Christians who’d come from that Hindu world.

And for the Muslim Imam who came as guest speaker for a class I taught, it was the same. One student asked: “Is there anything comparable in Islam to the Good News of forgiveness of sins because of Jesus?” He answered: “The Quran teaches that Allah is merciful and just, but that somebody else living 2000 years ago—even Jesus, the revered prophet—could cleanse me of my sins makes no sense.” Even worse, the very notion bordered on the morally reprehensible. “For the sinning I do, I am responsible for un-doing it. I have to do the atoning. That task simply cannot be transferred to someone else.”

With the Buddhism that Ziegenbalg also encountered in India, the same is true. And is still true today. No surrogate can take over the task of my salvation. A guru can indeed assist me, by showing me the many ways to move toward enlightenment, and suggest the way best suited for me. But his role is to teach ME

how do do it, so that it finally works for me. No substitutionary Lamb of God can take over my responsibility to work out my own salvation.

That same Gospel claim—Jesus as God’s Lamb who un-sins the world—was what scandalized many “really religious” Jews of Jesus’ day and led them finally to pass him by on the other side. That’s evident in the four Gospels as Jesus steadfastly hob-knobs with sinners as their friend and now and then flat-out forgives them.

In the epistles of the NT, the opening chapter of church history, we see evidence for two dominant self-salvation alternatives that competed with the Lamb-of-God good news right from the start. Scholars have given them the labels “gnosticism” (or even, “pneumatic gnosticism”) and “legalism” (often focused on actions mandated in the book of Leviticus). In the epistles we confront these alternatives, not outside of the Christian community, but inside. The former is prominent in the two Corinthian letters, the latter among the Christians addressed in Galatians. In both cases you have Christians—Christ-confessing folk—adding on a slice of self-salvation to their faith in Christ, the Lamb of God. In Corinth they are not “just” gnostics, but Christian gnostics. In Galatians they are not simply “Judaizers” hyping a “Back to Judaism!” but Christ-confessing Judaizers.

Ten years ago I wrote a few paragraphs on present-day gnosticism and legalism inside the church. But I’d completely forgotten it, and don’t remember any more how it even came about. Just this past week I found that two-pager buried in a file folder that I hadn’t touched for a decade. Russ Saltzmann printed the piece in his September 1996 issue of FORUM LETTER.

I started out citing Luther’s bon mot when asked whether the

scholastics of the 16th century Roman church or the Enthusiastic radicals (Muentzer and company) were the greater nemesis to the Gospel. Said Brother Martin: "They may appear to be two foxes running in opposite directions, but if you look closely, you'll see that their tails are tied together."

[From then on it went like this:]

The common denominator between legalism and gnosticism is three-fold.

1. Some achievement on the part of the believer is the trigger for being a genuine, a complete, Christian. The required achievement regularly centers around two poles: behavioral performance (legalism) or intellectual accomplishment (gnosticism). Within those two categories it can be as varied as you might imagine. It can be an achievement in ethics, experience, piety, intellect, or intellectual sacrifice. Some hurdle to jump over – mystical, doctrinal, libertarian, daring, ascetic – you name it. But as Melanchthon specified in Apology 4, the key verb, no matter which way the foxes seem to be running, is "require." That is where the tails are tied together. This or that something-or-other is required of the candidate before "real" salvation, "real" Christian status, is conferred on a person.
2. The analysis of the sinner's problem in Gnosticism and legalism is structurally the same. It denies (or at least ignores) the deep dimensions of human sinfulness. The dilemma of sinners gets diagnosed at the behavioral level, and may even be diagnosed deeper at the level of the heart or mind. It could go even to the depth-dimension of Augsburg Confession II: "not fearing God, not trusting God, and being curved into themselves." But then somewhere in, with, and under all that comes the premise that self-

help can reverse the diagnosis. Self-help can heal. Oh, to be sure, it may take a guru to get you started in this or that disciplined practice – ethical, experiential, meditative, mystical, aesthetic, et cetera. And it may take immense effort, but the premise is: “You can do it. You can do it, if you will only...” That “if you will only...” is what Melanchthon meant when he said “require” is the language of the law. When the law’s language is made the language of salvation, it is legalism. When Gnosticism gets around to its own sort of “requiring,” you see the tails tied together.

What is really bad about legalism (also when it comes in a Gnostic format) is that it takes the sinner’s accuser – the law of do this/do that – and proposes it as savior. But the first fallacy is its diagnosis of the sinner’s malady. It is too shallow.

Biblical metaphors for that malady signal a reality that no self-help can remedy. “Dead in trespasses and sins; at enmity with God; in bondage to sin” are some examples. To self-helpers, that poses the question: What resources are there in corpses to generate their own life, in enemies to extinguish enmity, and in prisoners to liberate themselves?

But it’s even worse than that. It’s not just that the sinner needs change – radical change – but God has to change, change from being the sinner’s executioner, the sinner’s own enemy, the sinner’s jail keeper. What self-help program are humans capable of to get God to change? How can sinners get God to stop “counting trespasses” against us, as St. Paul says in II Corinthians 5? The foxes of Gnosticism and legalism are united in denying that the situation is really this bad. And therefore . . .

3. Neither “-ism” needs the crucified and risen Messiah Jesus. Doubtless Jesus will be prominent in the rhetoric of either fox, for the legalisms we encounter in the church are claiming to be Christian. But as the Crucified and Risen Jesus, he won’t be “necessary.” Somebody else, some exemplary figure, some guru, can do the job that needs doing to get the sinner on track again. The rhetoric of “All you’ve got to do is...” signals that Christ is ultimately not necessary.

Instead of the law’s verb “require,” says Melanchthon in Apology 4, the Gospel’s contrasting verb is “offer.” It is the language of gift, the grammar of grace – even when it comes in the imperative mood: “Be reconciled to God!” However, the Gospel’s offer is not just “grace” instead of “performance.” It is the offer of Christ’s own self in place of the self-healer’s own self – dead, imprisoned and at enmity as it is.

The many shallow gospels – non-gospels, actually – on the scene today, both inside the church and outside (FROGBA being one of the major ones in the USA), push all Christians to ask: “Why Jesus?” That has always been the big question coming from world religions. What is there in Jesus, they ask, that we don’t already have with Muhammad, the Buddha, Moses, our Hindu heritage? When facing such classical alternatives to the Gospel – and to the new or old “other gospels” tempting Christians today – the first question to ask is: What’s your diagnosis of what’s wrong with us human beings?

And if, as regularly is the case, the diagnosis never gets to the third level, then “our” Jesus is probably not needed to heal the malady. Muammad, the Buddha, or even the late Timothy Leary may well be all that is needed to fix a shallow diagnosis. But if the sinner’s problem is

that God does indeed “count trespasses,” then there is a clear and quick answer to the question “Why Jesus?”

Namely, “in him God is doing something different with sinners: not counting our trespasses against us, but making him to be our sin (with all its lethal consequences) so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” Does any “other gospel” offer such a FROEHLICHER WECHSEL (Luther’s “joyful exchange,” bon mot for this passage from II Corinthians 5, Robert Bertram’s “sweet swap”)? If there is such, then that “other gospel” really is a competitor to the Good News about Jesus. But so far I haven’t heard of one that even comes close to “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

A Second Look at the Gospel of Mark—Midway in the Year of Mark

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The Currents issue that led us into Mark’s Gospel for the 2005–2006 church year (December 2005) did not do full justice,

in my opinion, to the Good News—the really “Good” and the really “New”—that Mark wants us to hear as he teases us to follow his opening words: “The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ the Son of God.”

The major item missing—or at best fuzzy—in the articles offered was the uniquely Good, the uniquely New, in the kingdom of God (reign of God) as Mark’s Jesus enacts it. One item that signals this right from the start is the frequent references to Jesus’ “revealing” the kingdom of God. Fact is, Mark never uses the terms “reveal” or “revelation” at all! So Mark’s Jesus does not reveal the kingdom of God— as though kingdom were already present, or had been around for a long time but concealed, and needed only to have the veil removed. No, apart from Jesus, the kingdom of God is not here, à la Mark. When “Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God, ” *then* “the kingdom of God was drawing near,” *then* “the time was fulfilled.” Jesus makes the kingdom of God happen. He enacts it. No Jesus, no kingdom of God—at least not Mark’s version of both Jesus and the kingdom of God.

So what is Jesus doing that had not been done before? What is not done when Jesus isn’t there doing it? The kingdom of God is the code word, but what’s that?

Yes, indeed, what *is* the kingdom of God? That was a hot-potato item at the time of the Reformation, one might even say *the* hot potato. It is a hot potato now. It’s hot in NT studies. See the stream of books coming from the Jesus Seminar and others as well—and the responses they elicit. One of the major Jesus Seminarists tells us that the debate about the kingdom of God is whether it is “salvation or ethics.” He claims that for Jesus the kingdom of God was ethics, and for his followers “ethics was salvation.” But not all agree. Kingdom of God is hot also in mission theology studies. See contemporary missiology journals

and conferences rallying around *missio Dei* as God's own kingdom project but then debating whether that kingdom of God is a "reign of peace and justice" on earth or something other than that.

The kingdom in Reformation Lutheran theology

Both of the major alternatives to the Lutheran reformers in the sixteenth century, the Roman establishment and the left-wing "radicals," were to this extent united— they both understood kingdom of God as a godly society on European soil. They differed sharply on the contours of that godly society. For one it was the godly society, mandated by Christ, organized and now managed by the churchly hierarchy centered in Rome. It was a "holy" Roman churchly empire replacing the less-than-holy pagan Roman empire that preceded it for a millennium on the very same soil.

For the left-wingers (enthusiasts and spiritualists, as their critics labeled them), such hierarchical centrism with top-down authority—and clout to carry it out—was still the pagan model, the exact opposite of what kingdom of God "really" was. For them the kingdom was a "narrow gauge" community—better, a community of godly communities—rallying around Jesus as Lord and Savior, not run from the top like an empire but organized ad hoc as internally cohesive fellowships committed to being a different mini-society, a radically different one, a godly one, in the midst of the ungodly maxi-society that was everywhere else. Kingdom of God was what Rome—in its ancient pagan format or its currently "holy" format—was not. Kingdom of God was a countercommunity of justice for injustice, love for cruelty, egalitarianism for hierarchicalism, mercy for military, peace for war, persuasion for coercion—and especially Jesus' affirming

the nobodies vs. Rome–pagan or holy–with its adulation for somebodies.

The Lutheran reformers said: “A pox on both your houses. That’s not what the term *kingdom of God* is talking about in the New Testament.” For the Lutheran re- formers the kingdom of God was some- thing New and Good on the *coram deo* agenda, where folks stand in the presence of God. It was not on the *coram hominibus* agenda, where folks face each other in daily life in human society. Being interpreted: kingdom of God occurs in the interface between God and human creatures, not the interface between the humans. Thus kingdom of God is not about ethics–how folks can live in godly fashion with one another in “peace and justice,” to use the current mantra. Kingdom of God is about salvation–how folks, yes, sinful folks, can survive, and then thrive, when standing face to face before God, which is every second of their lives. Simply said, kingdom of God is God’s own “regime change” at the God-sinner interface. God initiates the change at the interface, switching from “counting trespasses” to “son/daughter, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven.”

Let’s take a look into Luther’s Large Catechism and its explanation of the kingdom petition (#2) of the Lord’s Prayer.

The kingdom in the Catechism

What is the kingdom of God?

Answer: Simply what we heard above in the Creed [the immediately preceding section of the catechism], namely, that God sent his Son, Christ our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, to bring us to himself, and to rule us as a king of righteousness, life and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience. To this end he also gave his Holy Spirit to deliver this to us through his holy Gospel and to enlighten and strengthen us in faith by his power.

Notice *where* the regime changes: in our God-relationship, and that bilaterally. First from God's side in God's "sending Christ ... to bring us to himself," and subsequently from our side in a "faith" that now trusts this change-of-rule(s) "given" by the Holy Trinity.

In the next paragraph Luther signals the mission trajectory of this kingdom petition.

This we ask, both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it and also in order that it may find approval and gain followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world. In this way many, led by the Holy Spirit, may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of redemption, so that we may all remain together eternally in this kingdom.

Is there any connection here to the agenda being hyped in much kingdom-of-God theology today, the agendas of peace, justice, and the integrity of creation? Not, in this kingdom petition, for Luther. That is not the kingdom of God agenda. "From this you see that we are not asking here for ... a temporal, perishable blessing, but for an eternal, priceless treasure and for everything that God himself possesses."

Are then this-worldly blessings of peace, justice, and creation's preservation of no concern for Luther? By no means. But these concerns come in the fourth petition together with everything that comes under the umbrella of "daily bread." God gives daily bread "even to the godless and rogues"—thus apart from any Christ component in the transaction. To use another of Luther's metaphors, it is God's left-hand regime in action. All of this happens apart from the efforts of the One now sitting at God's right hand. In short, all of those daily bread goodies do not bring the super-goodies in the kingdom of God

package—"bring us to God and generate faith."

Yet daily bread is big stuff. That loaf is as wide as *coram hominibus*—the whole human race—reaches:

Everything that belongs to our entire life in this world ... not only food and clothing and other necessities for our body, but also peace and concord in our daily activities, associations, and situations of every sort with the people among whom we live and with whom we interact—in short, in everything that pertains to the regulation of both our domestic and our civil or political affairs.

Sounds like the current mantra of "peace, justice, and the integrity of creation." However, note this: Never once does Christ's name appear as Luther expounds the daily-bread petition. Why not?

God has other agents assigned to these agendas. Hundreds of them! "Governments ...rulers ... the emperor, kings, and all estates, especially the princes of our land, all councilors, magistrates, and officials. " And, even closer to home, "spouse, children, and servants ... faithful neighbors, and good friends," etc. In Luther's vocabulary these agents are all God's left-handers, caring for and preserving God's old creation and us within it.

But they—Christians included in their left-hand callings—are incapable of fabricating the kingdom of God, a.k.a. the New Creation. Left-handers do not have the wherewithal to bring on the regime change that reconciles sinners to God. Godly agents they indeed are, but not "God-ly " enough to carry out the task of the incarnate son of God—in his body on the tree. It's that simple. God was in Christ, yes, attending to that agenda. That is the hype of saying "*solus Christus* " in Reformation rhetoric. Scripture never predicates this achieve- ment to any other of

God's manifold agents throughout the world.

But after Easter Christ does pass on this unique authority to his disciples—"to forgive sins." So with this authorization they actually do become agents for the regime change that was once Christ's and Christ's alone. Now recreated to have a right hand in addition to their left, they become "little Christs " in the right-hand regime called kingdom of God. Of course, they get this clout, and the chutzpah to exercise it, only by virtue of God's original Right-Hander hanging on to them—and they to him.

Summa. The agenda of peace, justice, and the integrity of creation is the stuff of the daily bread of human life; it is not the stuff of the kingdom of God, God's recon- ciling regime change with sinners. The fourth petition is distinct from the second.

In both we are still petitioners. It is still the same deity, with two different agendas. One cares for creation, the other redeems it. One is God's "old " regime in the "old creation, " the other is God's "regime change" that brings on a "new creation." One is ethics *coram hominibus*, the other salva- tion *coram deo*. The scripture's own anthropomorphic image of an ambidextrous deity helped Luther get his hands on it.

Back to Mark's Gospel

Are Mark and Martin on the same page? One way is to look at all the kingdom of God references in Mark's Gospel. There are twelve of them in the NRSV, although "other ancient authorities" have a different count.

The first one (1:15) I cited above and interpreted as: when "Jesus comes preach- ing the Good News of God, " then "the kingdom of God is at hand." And therefore two imperatives are in

order: "Repent and believe the Good News." In nickel words, "Turn away from whatever you've had your heart hanging on and hang your heart on Jesus's Good News." The folks noticed its novelty. "A new teaching! With author- ity! " (1:27) It's not only Good News *of* God, it's Good News *from* God. That is made "perfectly clear" in the pericope that anchors the first series of healings. "My son, your sins are forgiven"—and he is healed of his paralysis. That designates what the "authority" issue is and who has it. Here Jesus' authority is designated not as super-physician "but that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins." It's a salvation agenda, not ethics.

The next three references to the king- dom (4:11, 26, 30) are linked to parables. Though the "mystery" of the kingdom of God "has been given" to the disciples, and parabolically hidden from the outsiders, the disciples "do not understand the parables " either. What is so hidden about the kingdom? Though Mark's Jesus says it plainly—three explicit passion predic- tions—what nobody catches on to is that it takes a crucified Messiah to unlock the parables. That is the mystery the farmer doesn't know even though he eventually benefits from the harvest. That is the infini- tesimal mustard seed that morphs into huge—God-sized—dimensions.

The fifth reference to the kingdom (9:47) comes at the linchpin between chap- ters 8 and 9. First comes Peter's Christ confession at Caesarea Philippi (coupled with his "dumb" rebuking of Jesus for making the first passion prediction). Then follows the "take up your cross and follow me " and the two alternatives for losing/ saving your life. After this Jesus says that some of those "standing here will not see death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." That power-play hap- pened on Good Friday. It may not have looked like power at all if you viewed it with *theologia gloriae* lenses. But if you

viewed it with the lenses of *theologia crucis*, it was the grand finale of his “authority to forgive sins.” Some did see it, even if it took a longer time to see it clearly (8:22ff.) Some never did. But that was not because it wasn’t there right before their eyes. They had eye trouble. “They did indeed see, but did not understand” (4:12). This kingdom is available for all, but all don’t get into it. Why not?

Kingdom reference six (9:47) gives a clue. There are things that make folks stumble: dear objects of value, even as dear as “a hand, a foot, an eye. ” When hearts are hanging on such objects, even great and good ones like these three, so that they stumble, get barricaded from Jesus’ agenda, they don’t get into the kingdom. This is but a variation on Jesus’ opening line in 1:15 about repenting and hanging your heart on God’s Good News. So it is “better for you to enter the kingdom of God with only one of the original two than to go into the grim future of unforgiven sinners.”

On to kingdom references seven and eight (10:14, 15). The kingdom is for kids. Grownups need to be childlike in order to be there. It’s all about “letting,” about the posture of receptivity. The kids in the pericope “let” Jesus “take them in his arms, and bless them, laying his hands upon them.” Blessing is a *coram deo* transaction—an absolute freebee, a straight analogue to a regime of God’s mercy management of sinners. God is the active subject, sinners the passive receivers. The kingdom of God transpires only if the receivers “let” it happen.

Kingdom reference nine (10:23, 24, 25) tells how hard it is for rich folks to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples are “exceedingly astonished,” yet they sense it’s about their own *coram deo* agenda. (One “ancient authority” has Mark making it perfectly clear here. It is “those who *trust* in riches.” Trust

is *coram deo* stuff.) The disciples reply: "Who then can be saved?" Doesn't wealth mark one as favored by God? Conversely, don't we get credit for all we've given up to follow you, Jesus? All depends, says Jesus, whether or not the divestment was "for my sake and for the gospel." The kingdom of God is not about brownie points, says Jesus. Browniepoints— trusters wind up last; folks with no points at all wind up first. It is God's own "impos- sible " way of answering "Who can be saved?"

The tenth kingdom word (12:34) is spoken to the scribe who got Jesus to answer the "great commandment" question, after which Jesus also adds the "second commandment" corollary. The scribe then commends Jesus for his right answer and adds that obeying the double-love commandment is "more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Whereupon Jesus says: "You are not far from the kingdom of God. " How so "not far" if God's kingdom is what we've been portraying it to be?

Well, he is clearly focused on the *coram deo* agenda. That puts him "nearer" than those of his day who thought otherwise. Could Mark be teasing us with a pun, that, face to face with Jesus (*coram Jesu*), this questioner is indeed as "near" to the kingdom as he's ever been? Still stuck on getting the commandments right—even "with all his heart"—he is not yet in and under the mercy regime, the radical regime change, that God is offering in the One standing before him.

Kingdom reference eleven (14:25) takes place when Jesus is on the eve of his capture: "This is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God. " This has to be pointing straight to Good Friday just hours away. In responding to the pleas of Zebedee's sons for privileged places "in your glory" (10:35–44), Jesus had spoken of "drinking the cup " that entailed "giving

his life as a ransom for many.” Here in 14:25 Jesus says it’s a “new ” drinking. He had never done it before, nor had any other predecessor servant of God. This sort of kingdom-cup drinking ransoms sinners. Ransoming sinners is a *coram deo* agenda. It’s salvation, not ethics.

The last reference to the kingdom in Mark (15:43) comes when Joseph of Arimathea, “who was also looking for the kingdom of God, ” closes the Good Friday story and “laid him in a tomb.” Even though we’ll never know what Joseph may have said, we do see what Mark wants us to see. Joseph is a disciple, an insider to what Jesus was up to. Yes, he was a “respected member of the Sanhedrin,” and he was very “near” to the kingdom of God. So near that he actually carried the body of the Regime Changer to its resting place.

Conclusive for this survey of kingdom of God in Mark is that Mark and Martin are indeed on the same page. No hint in Mark that the kingdom Jesus is enacting is the *coram hominibus* agenda of “peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.” Peace instead of enmity between God and hu- mankind, mercy-justice that trumps equity-justice for sinners, and the integrity of being reintegrated into God’s family. All of that transpires by virtue of what Mark announces in his very first words: “the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

A kingdom-of-God look at the remaining Markan pericopes

There are twenty-five Sundays after Pentecost in the 2006 Church Year, and I shall survey the final twelve Sunday Gospels this year from Mark. These twelve follow immediately the Johannine “comma” in- serted into the lectionary from Pentecost 9 to 12. I do not repeat comments on these pericopes made in the paragraphs

above.

If kingdom of God in Mark does indeed unfold on the *coram deo* (CD) interface, the Sunday Gospel readings signal a gospel like this:

Pentecost 13, Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23. It's things inside that defile. Defilement and cleansing are an "inside" matter, of "the heart," that is, "hearts that are far from God. " Clearly a CD agenda. The traditions of the elders—then and now or elsewhere—won't fix it. They can't fix it. "Worshipping him" is now "the commandment of God. " Who else can clean up the mess at the CD interface? Moses is brought into the discussion, but "the way you handle Moses, given your far-away hearts, voids the word of God that he spoke."

Pentecost 14, Mark 7:24–37. Syrophenician woman's daughter and the "ephphatha" miracle. Spirit possession is always a CD agenda. God is the rightful "owner" of all images of God. Alternate possessors are usurpers, infringing on the CD interface. Whereas our mindset today is to wrestle with the "demon" element in exorcism pericopes, the NT accent is on the possessing, an alien "lord/owner." That alien is now managing God's turf—to the destruction of the managed property. Destruction is what *diabolos* means. The outsider mother, who somehow had gotten the clue about Jesus' authority on her daughter's CD turf, trusts him to use it for her, though she has zero credentials for her petition. She begs (absolute posture of receptivity), and he does it. The "*ephphatha* " pericope is parallel, with the accent of open ears and loosened tongue, *the* channels (so Luther) for heart transactions.

Pentecost 15, Mark 8:27–38. Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. Peter is rebuked. Yes, Jesus is the Messiah, and that triggers the first passion prediction. Peter is blinded by

the suffering-servant center of what he has just confessed. Not only for Jesus, but for “any who come after me.” Saving and losing life is a CD agenda. Everybody does finally “lose.” But there are two ways to do your losing. One is to hang on to your life and strive to preserve every segment of it. But that’s forfeiture for sure, a guaranteed loser. The other way is to lose it (give it away) “for my sake and the gospel’s” and—voila!—you get it all back again! You are either ashamed of this “loser” Jesus or you trust him. That determines the interface with the Father—from here to eternity. Maxim: “Winning by losing,” but losing in a particular (messianic) way.

Pentecost 16, Mark 9:30–37. Comes now the second passion prediction, “but they did not understand and were afraid to ask.” Not a smart tactic. Just how dumb it is we see in the next paragraph, where they argue about who is the brightest and best. Jesus’ one-liner response is “Do you want to be first? Then be last and everybody’s slave,” after which he adds seemingly nonsequitur words about “receiving children, receiving me, and receiving the one who sent me.” Even if a bit opaque here, Mark does (a) hype children again, (b) signal the CD “defect” in the disciples in wanting to be climbers, and (c) signal the kingdom of God: a posture of receptivity and receiving (= faith-trusting) the one whom God has sent.

Pentecost 17, Mark 9:38–50. Added here is the incident of the “outsider” exorcising “in Jesus’ name.” Jesus responds that whoever operates “in Jesus’ name” is OK. What it means to work “in Jesus’ name” is not to recite the words as a mantra but to be in his name, that is, “owned” by him and thus re-owned (=the literal meaning of redemption) by his Father. This reading concludes with the word about good and bad salt and the imperative “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” Peace *coram hominibus* is a product of peace *coram deo*. So the saline solution must be the very one who’s speaking these

salty lines.

Pentecost 18, Mark 10:2–16. Added to the kingdom-of-God text here is the divorce pericope. The two together offer the overall contrast between what's "lawful" (ko- sher) and what Jesus is doing with the kids. The depth problem in fractured marriages, says Jesus, is "hardness of heart." That is a God problem, a CD dilemma. Moses' legislation is God-given. Like much of God's law, it is an interim stopgap emergency measure (so Luther) to prevent even worse destruction. But Moses' measure does not heal the CD dilemma. What does heal that dilemma is signaled by the kingdom-of-God dealings Jesus does with the kids: embracing, blessing, keeping his hands on them. Healing comes by receiving. All of the benefits of the kingdom of God come only in the posture of receptivity.

Pentecost 19, Mark 10:17–31. The rich man's "good teacher" inquiry leads into the kingdom of God conversation. He asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. Whether Mark intends us to see the oxymoron of "doing" something in order to "inherit" something is hard to tell. Nevertheless the agenda is CD—eternal life and treasure in heaven. "Divest, radically divest," says Jesus, not only your "great possessions" but also your addiction to "observing all these commandments" in order to get your "inheritance." Here's the kingdom-of-God alternative: "Come, follow me."

Pentecost 20, Mark 10:35–45. Here Jesus expounds the authority issue. There are two kinds, he says. There's Gentile authority and his alternative—yes, the kingdom of God's alternative—sort of authority. One is authority over, the other is authority under. James and John—yes, "the ten " too —are hooked on Gentile authority. They want to be on top. But that's an absolute no-no in Jesus' kingdom of God regimen: "It shall not be so among you." Kingdom of God authority is the upside-down pyramid, serving

and not being served. Jesus makes it happen, “giving his life a ransom for many.” Thus he “drinks the cup, ” “gets baptized.” James and John say they are “able” to do that, too, but of course they aren’t. Their own CD status needs help. When that interface is “served” by Jesus’ own life giving, James and John will indeed replicate his “drinking the cup ” and “getting baptized”—not only with his authority under them but also into exercising his bizarre upside-down authority themselves with others.

Pentecost 21, Mark 10:46–52. It is all about mercy. Two times blind Bartimaeus pleads for mercy. Even the reference to Jesus as Son of David is a coded mercy reference. Bartimaeus has already “seen” something in Jesus; Mark doesn’t tell us how. John 9 takes a whole chapter to render his second opinion on this diagnosis. But Mark tells it succinctly: It is “faith” that “makes Bartimaeus well.” What “faith” means here is at least twofold: (1) confidence that Jesus is able to do what is asked for, and (2) trust that Jesus will actually do it for a nobody, a blind beggar. Sure enough, Bartimaeus “received his sight and followed him on the way.”

Pentecost 22, Mark 12:28–34. The “no more questions” to Jesus comes with the either-or of holding to the commandments or to the Christ on the CD interface. The lectionary text editors could have made it easier for preaching the kingdom on this one if they had added Jesus’ counter question in the very next verses that Mark gives us (“David calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?”). Follow Melanchthon’s axiom in Apology 4. If the promise is not present in a pericope to be preached, “add it, ” he says. Mark has it right there in the following verses. Note that the Christ “is the son of David.” Not Moses. Thus he is genetically inclined toward God’s chesed operation, mercy for the commandment breakers. The folks who need that, who know they need that,

“hear him gladly.”

Pentecost 23, Mark 12:38–44. The contrast Jesus makes between the scribes and the widow is itself a classic kingdom of God parable. The switcheroo happens as the really religious folks “receive greater condemnation” and the commendation goes to the nobody who after her offering has nothing. How like God’s own operation in Jesus. God, the widow, giving his all, so that sinners can get genetic healing at the CD interface.

Pentecost 24, Mark 13:1-8. The Sunday reading is only the first eight verses of Mark’s 36-verse apocalypse chapter. The entire chapter is one unit, with nine adverbative “but ” interventions as Jesus zigzags through the collapse of temple and cosmos. When worlds collapse—our personal private ones as well as cosmic cataclysms— the “but ” of the kingdom of God “gospel being preached to all nations” is manifold. That gospel survives, and so do those trusting it. Survival is always an event at the CD interface. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” “But whoever endures to the end will be saved.” When an “apocalypse now ” calls you to the witness stand and you are tongue- tied with angst, “say whatever is given you in that hour ... the Holy Spirit will supply the vocables. ” Mark gives a hint of an “apocalypse now ” on Good Friday afternoon with a solar eclipse and a shredded temple curtain. Matthew tweaks the apocalyptic theme even more as Jesus dies. Throughout, the watchword is “watch, watch, watch.” *But* do so cross-eyed: left eye on our crumbling worlds, right eye on the One whom God raised after his own crumbling.

After all this, what’s “Good,” what’s “New”?

Answer: Everything. From that “beginning of the gospel” and its

Good Friday and Easter Sunday climax comes the freebee offer of a life that lasts, survival on the CD interface. If that's not good, not new, what is? From that new interface new intrahuman interfaces sprout, and for Mark it is the nobodies who are the beneficiaries. Thirty- three times Mark refers to them with the Greek word *ochlos*, usually rendered in English translations as "crowd, throng, multitude." Korean NT scholar Ahn Byung Moo has shown that this key term in Mark is not really a numerical designation but a social-theological term. The *ochlos* are the outsiders, the nobodies, the rabble, the folks who don't count. It's not that nobodiness makes anybody virtuous. No, the *ochlos* in Mark are sinners, too. They also cry "Cru- cify! " at the end. They are not very differ- ent from Judas or Peter and all the deserting disciples. But Jesus still comes to them and for them, and when it clicks at the CD interface, Mark tells us "the *ochlos* heard him gladly."

We do not get much "ethical" admonition in Mark's Gospel. People, often his adversaries, come to Jesus with apparently moral questions asking "Is it lawful?" But Jesus regularly bends them into CD ques- tions—salvation issues, not ethics. Not that the seekers are left with "only" salvation and no "ethics"—the classic charge (canard?) contra Lutherans—but apart from the CD salvation that Jesus offers there is no Christian ethics. Ethics, yes, but none that flows from the kingdom's mercy interface with God. Only from such new roots can the tree bear new fruits. Only Matthew and Luke quote Jesus saying that. Mark could have but did not. Possibly no one ever passed it on to him. What he does pass on to us is still mighty "good" and mighty "new"—just as he promised in his opening sentence.

[ASecondLookAtMark \(PDF\)](#)

The St. Louis Bonhoeffer Conference, July 19-21, 2006

Colleagues,

My first thought was to start this post with a different focus. As Hezbollah rockets continue to rain down on Haifa, and the Israelis continue to retaliate throughout Lebanon, I checked a topographical map of Israel and Lebanon to get some clarity. When I zeroed in on Haifa, I got more than I wanted.

Haifa is at that coastal point on Israel's western boundary that juts out into the Mediterranean from an otherwise smooth coastline. "Pushing" that point out into the sea is Haifa's backdrop, Mt. Carmel, the highpoint (1800 ft.) of a mountain range that slants back away from the sea to the southeast. At the other end of that range, 20 miles away from Haifa, is Har-Megiddo, "Mount Megiddo," in Hebrew. Drop the "H" and you have Armageddon. Gulp.

The word Armageddon appears only once in the Bible, Revelation 16:16. "And they [demonic spirits] assembled them [the kings of the whole world for battle] at the place that in Hebrew is called Harmagedon."

Add more rockets and bombs and you have it indeed. Armageddon Now. Apocalypse Now. Reflections on "Apocalypse Now" have been in these posts before. I just checked the internal Google search for our Crossings webpage <www.crossings.org> and got 36 hits. If interested, you can do likewise.

But something else also happened this past week, and that's the

topic for ThTh 424. It was the Bonhoeffer Conference in St. Louis. It doesn't take much of a segue to get from Israel/Hezbollah these days to Bonhoeffer/Berlin in the days of Hitler's Third Reich.

We had our own mini-apocalypse (if that's not an oxymoron) here in St. Louis during the conference. At almost the very moment that things were to begin on Wednesday evening (7:30 p.m.) a storm with never-before-recorded violence ("hurricane 2" strength, we were later told) struck St. Louis. As we're waiting in the auditorium for the kick-off event, the Bonhoeffer film, electricity fails and never comes back for the whole rest of the conference. And the daily temperatures are pushing 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

But it was a Bonhoeffer conference. So even though we couldn't see the film without electricity, we could talk and listen to one another. Compared to Bonhoeffer's life and times this was chicken-feed. Or as his own Finkenwalde ["forest of finches"] seminary students would have said: "Kleiner Käse!" (small cheese). So we improvised, gathered in a lecture hall that had a whole north wall of windows. We sweat and kept the water jugs close.

Five speakers anchored the conference. All of them major players in scholarship about Dietrich Bonhoeffer [Hereafter DB]. Charles Ford, local St. Louisian and one of those pros, organized the gathering focusing on the Lutheran roots of DB's theology. That's still one of the ongoing debates in the International Bonhoeffer Society [hereafter IBS]. Who was DB's own major mentor? Though he draws on Luther all the time—as do most German Protestant theologians, regardless of their personal theological predilections—it's not always clear. Not clear enough to settle the debate: Where is he really coming from?

The conference speakers thought he was coming from Luther, and in several of the presentations that was made “perfectly clear.”

Presentation #1

Bonhoeffer and the Church Struggle – H. Gaylon Barker

[Barker is a Lutheran parish pastor in Connecticut, Adjunct Prof at Molloy College (Rockville Center NY), IBS board member, editor for the English language edition of DB’s works.]

Here’s Barker’s own abstract of his paper:

“During the 1930s German Church Struggle DB 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 very church’s existence by wedding Nazi ideology to Christ.”

Barker at the end, but sotto voce, (too much so, I thought) 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. A pity. Does FROGBA not equally “compromise the church’s existence by wedding AMERICAN ideology to Christ?” How different in theological substance are these “Amerikanische Christen” from the “Deutsche Christen” that triggered the time for confessing of DB, and gave the movement its name “The Confessing Church”? Why is there no “Confessing Church” in the USA today? He “almost” addressed those questions. ThTh readers will know that I wish he had not only done so, but

then answered them using the data he'd already given us. Perhaps I can get him to do just that for a future ThTh posting. I've already asked. He hasn't yet said no.

Presentation #2

Bonhoeffer: Politics and Christian Martyrdom – Craig Slane

[Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Simpson University, Redding California, author of the book BONHOEFFER AS MARTYR, 2004]

I have not read Slane's book. In his presentation, he told us, he was not repeating what he said there, but moving to a spinoff from that work to look at DB's martyrdom in terms of social ethics, its beneficial consequences for others. Most often martyrs are noted for standing firm, confessing the faith, not opting for apostasy in the face of death. Polycarp's martyrdom (155 A.D. Smyrna, Asia Minor) was that, but there was more. He was a paradigm for martyrdom that had social-ethical consequences, benefits even, for others. His death, so Slane, had "power to quell violence."

He then connected that theme to DB, tracing it through his theology and in the communal life at the underground seminary in Finkenwalde. Thomas a'Kempis' classic work from the Middle Ages, IMITATION OF CHRIST, was prominent in the theology studied and communal life lived at Finkenwalde. As DB continued to work with the martyr-theme, the NT term "image of Christ" began to replace "imitation of Christ." For one reason, the imitation motif always rested on the imitator striving to be like Christ. The NT term left the initiative to Christ imparting, impressing, his image on the disciples following in his train.

Martyrdom in a “world come of age” may not lead to death. It can be a “white” martyrdom. Fundamental to either red or white martyrdom is this: as Christ shapes his disciples to conform to himself, the disciples in following Christ are at work to conform the world to Christ.

Presentation #3

Bonhoeffer and the German Resistance – Dr. Charles Ford

[Conference organizer, Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science at Saint Louis University, recognized Bonhoeffer scholar.]

Here is Ford’s own abstract of his presentation:

“Dietrich Bonhoeffer recognized at the outset of the Church struggle, at the beginning of April 1933, the centrality of the Jewish question, and appealed to Luther in declaring that the Church is the place where Jew and German stand together under the Word of God. He spoke of the defenders of humane values who had left the Church and, in their struggle for justice, truth, humanity, and freedom, had become homeless. They learned once again to speak the name of Jesus Christ, even in hesitation and with genuine fear, and found in it a new purpose and power.”

Along the way Ford constructed—and documented—an amazing story of DB’s bridge-building to these “homeless humanists,” his by-and-large “unchurched” co-conspirators in the resistance.

Many of the leading figures in the German resistance were at best “casual” Christians. DB, as pastor and committed believer, was the exception. The resistance movement was not a “churchy”

undertaking, if for no other reason than that the assassination of Hitler was central to the program and killing God's appointed leaders has scant Biblical warrant. The resistance figures were among the brightest and best of German "Kulturprotestantismus" (cultural protestantism) in the early decades of the 20th century.

DB's own family was not particularly "churchy" either. Here too he was the exception, and elicited dismay when he opted to study theology instead of some obviously "significant" discipline. They too were mostly cultural Christians. Yes, the kids were all baptized, confirmed and married "in church." That was public decency. Once a year Christmas Eve church service with all those dear carols was a must. Bach was beloved. Propriety and morality were fundamental to their way of life. They were committed humanists.

Ford showed us that, as the resistance progressed and progressively failed in the many attempts to kill Hitler—was God really protecting him?—these "dear worldlings" showed themselves (much to their own surprise) to be "homesick humanists." Homesick for the Christian roots that had spawned the virtues, the high culture, the freedom, the decency, even the Wissenschaft (all of them God's left-hand good things) that the Christian Gospel aided and abetted. When the July 20, 1944 assassination attempt failed—Ford was telling us this on July 20, 2006—and the roof caved in, some of these homesick humanists found themselves "learning once again to speak the name of Jesus Christ, even in hesitation and with genuine fear, and found in it a new purpose and power."

DB's words and witness had built bridges for these homesick humanists—at least some of them—his dear "worldling" co-conspirators, now fellow prisoners and facing the gallows, bridges for them to come back home.

Presentation #4

Bonhoeffer, Luther and Monasticism – Dr. Jonathan Sorum

[Theology professor at Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia, widely recognized Bonhoeffer scholar.]

DB once said that Luther's departure from the monastery may well have been his most significant reformation act. He replaced world-denying monasticism with a "worldly" monasticism. Its rubrics: living 100% as Christ's disciple IN the world—just as Christ lived IN the world as a "man for [all] others."

Worldly monasticism could be called the cantus firmus of DB's classic book NACHFOLGE ("Discipleship" although its title in English translation has unhappily—so Sorum—been "Cost of Discipleship"). The term comes from Jesus' simple invitation to his hearers (in German) "Folge mir nach." "Follow me." When you make a noun out of that verb you get "Nachfolge," simply "following." In articulating worldly monasticism DB recovers the church distinct from the world, while at the same time in solidarity with that world. Clearly such a Nachfolge call from Christ reshapes Christian Gospel proclamation away from getting souls to heaven toward being "little Christs" for all others in the world.

Two or three times Sorum, if I heard him aright (and we didn't get printed copies of the addresses), said that Luther's and DB's proposal for worldly monasticism was their alternative to "orders of creation" theology. I don't think so, at least not for Luther. He often linked the two, contrasting the monastic "orders" with the "orders" (relational patterns) in which the Creator places us at the very beginning of our life as human

creatures. To wit, where God “ordains” for us to live out our life as his creature, in the context of the “givens” we have received. So, for Luther, joining a monastic order—and thereby deserting these “worldly” linkages and relationships and the RESPONSIBILITIES that come therewith— is thumbing one’s nose at God who put us there. It’s choosing something better than God chose for us. How on earth (sic!) can that be done faithfully?

If that is what Sorum said, maybe I can get him to respond to this comment.

Presentation #5

Bonhoeffer and Contemporary Medical Ethics – Dr. Christopher Hook

[C. Christopher Hook, professor of medicine (hematology/oncology) at the Mayo Medical School, medical ethicist]

That much we got in the printed program. When we asked what “medical ethicist” meant, he (humbly) told us: “In the field of medical ethics, I am actively involved in scholarship and research in the areas of end-of-life ethics, reproductive medicine ethics, genetic ethics, the ethics of biotechnology (including stem cell and cloning research), transplantation ethics, the ethics of new technologies (particularly cybernetics, nanotechnology and artificial intelligence), the philosophy of technology and science, and research involving teaching methods in ethics.

“I have expressed these interests internally to Mayo by founding the Mayo Clinical Ethics Council, the Ethics Consultation Service, the Ethics Education Committee, the Reproductive Medicine Advisory Board, the DNA Research Sub-committee of the

IRB, the Institutional Ethics & Bioterrorism Task Force, and assisting the formation of the Transplantation Ethics Advisory Board and the Psychogenomic Ethics.”

Some of those high-falutin terms I’d heard of before, but by the end of his presentation we knew what some of them meant—and had learned a few more. Such as “techno sapiens” and “transhumanism.”

Hook’s lecture, the last of the conference, was scary. [If Barker had expanded on the parallels between the syncretism of the “German Christians” and the syncretism of FROGBA, his could have gotten scary too.]

Scary were the parallels Hook drew between today’s super-duper medical technology already in place and Hitler’s programs of medical research, experimentation and engineering in DB’s days to produce a super Aryan race, where “valueless human beings” were identified and then discarded. Hook claimed that he was no “techno-luddite,” though he gets that epithet now and again in the work he does. It’s not the technology per se, the “nanotechnology” that can create and place atom-sized entities within the human body to fix formerly unfixable defects and even enhance the healthy that is Hitlerian. It is the accompanying ideology that regularly goes with it. If the nanotechnology elicited a “Gee whiz!” from us, the ideology elicited “Angst.” For it is way beyond Hitler’s mad dream of the Aryan “Uebermensch.”

That ideology keeps popping up in the cutting edge literature of Hook’s world. He quoted us texts about “techno-sapiens,” the cyborg [CYBernetic ORGanism] superman just over the horizon to replace homo sapiens. That we are biological creatures is simply our current status, transhumanists believe, but it is not necessary for defining who we are or who we should be. In his

book HEAVEN IN A CHIP (2002) Bart Kosko, USC scientist, puts it more bluntly: "Biology is not our destiny. It was never more than tendency. It was just nature's first quick and dirty way to compute with meat. Chips are destiny."

Or this in Katherine Hayles' HOW WE BECAME POSTHUMAN. "In the posthuman, there are no essential differences, or absolute demarcations, between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot technology and human goals. . . . Humans can either go gently into that good night, joining the dinosaurs as a species that once ruled the earth but is now obsolete, or hang on for a while longer by becoming machines themselves. In either case . . . the age of the human is drawing to a close."

This is not sci-fi, Hook assured us. The US Congress is convinced and is funding it. Already in 2003 President Bush signed into law the "21st Century Nanotechnology Research and Development Act." The bill gives nanotech "a permanent home in the federal government" and assigns nearly \$3.7 billion over four years to get us there.

In his analysis Hook highlighted transhumanism as a "new incarnation of gnosticism, which sees the body as simply the first prosthesis we all learn to manipulate." Gnostics from of old have found the human body defective and finally dispensable. Au contraire Christian theology where "embodiment is fundamental to our identity, designed by God, and sanctified by the incarnation of Christ and his bodily resurrection. Unlike classical gnostics, transhumanists reject the notion of eternal soul and substitute for it the idea of an information pattern."

Bonhoeffer's protest against the IN-human Uebermensch "gospel" of the Nazis, with German scientists doing their best to make it come true, calls us to do likewise vis-a-vis the even more

frightening Uebermensch ideology and “scientific research” to create techno sapiens. The Bible’s “image of God” and “image of Christ” for humankind—created and then redeemed—is what the Christians proclaim as a Gospel both Good and New in the face of that long history of Pelagian proposals for human salvation, including cyber-chip super-duper wonders of our day. The conflict is finally THEOlogical. IDEOlogy is but another kind of THEOlogy. It is about the doctrine of humankind (what are human beings?), the doctrine of sin (what really needs fixing in the human race?) and salvation (what’s needed to heal that malady—and is such healing available anywhere?).

Hook’s conclusion: “Christians must not become techno-luddites, suspicious of all new technologies. While technology is not our salvation, neither is it intrinsically evil. Technology has enhanced our ability to show compassion and to spread the Gospel. Christians need to be techno-realists, recognizing the potential goods of innovation, but realistically anticipating and restricting its potential harms. This requires a correct understanding of human nature and of God’s ultimate plans for our species that only the gospel can provide. Christians must boldly engage in the discussion of these issues, both among themselves and in the public square.”

I think Hook might have been even bolder himself. I remember from Seminex days students asking Bob Bertram whether Transactional Analysis (the current rage at the time) was kosher or not. He responded with a two-page article [now archived on the Crossings website]. Here’s his last paragraph: “For the most constructive use of TA by Christians I would propose two alternatives. We should either demythologize TA’s soteriological pretensions and then employ it for a very limited level of secular, interpersonal behavioral change, or we should

radicalize it with the anti-Gnostic Secret of the Christian Gospel and then use it for the Kingdom unabashedly and outright. Of these two alternatives, my preference is the second.”

Might TA in that paragraph be replaced with TS, techno sapiens? Can TS be kept out of the salvation business? That’s the DB/Luther issue for conversation with transhumanism.

A round-table conversation among the five speakers brought the conference to an end in near total darkness with a flashlight illuminating the face so we could see who was speaking. Three days and still no electricity.

Perhaps that’s a signal. Perhaps an act of God will stonewall transhumanism and its salvation project. Suppose ALL the lights went out. Despite Christian witness for an “image-of-God, image of Christ” humanity in the face of this false Gospel, the course of human history suggests: If it can be done, it will be done. The drive to “Ueberschensch” is endemic to the offspring of Adam and Eve. It’s not the scientific labs that are dangerous. It’s “God-wannabe” lab workers. Even more, “wannabe” saviors of the race.

Yet Hitler’s Ueberschensch project crumbled when Germany crumbled. Could it happen here? Our impending Apocalypse Now may be right in our own back yard, thousands of miles away from Har-Megiddo. Wherever it is, whenever it comes, Christ’s words still pertain: “Repent and believe the Good News.” Which being interpreted is: “Even if the techno sapiens masters won’t, then you, my remnant, make a U-turn away from cyborg salvation and trust my Gospel. And so long as you have voice, tell others what you’re doing, and invite them to Nachfolge.”

Peace & Joy!

First Lutheran Missionary in India—Arrived 300 years ago (July 9, 1706)

Colleagues

“Lutheran Missionary’s Legacy Hailed at Tranquebar Tercentenary Celebrations in India Seminar, International Consultation, Look at Past and Post-Modern Mission Challenges”

That was the headline on the press release coming from the Luth. World Federation on Tuesday. Here is the full text.

GENEVA, 18 July 2006 (LWI) Tribute was paid to the legacy of the first Protestant missionary to arrive in India, in 1706, at a one-day seminar and a two-day international consultation, organized for July 4, and July 5-6 respectively, during the recent tercentenary celebrations held in Chennai (old Madras), India. Three hundred church leaders, delegates and scholars, including 100 international delegates led by Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Mark S. Hanson and LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, attended the celebrations, which took place 3-9 July at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Chennai, in the state of Tamil Nadu, and in Tranquebar (known as Tarangambadi in Tamil), 300 kilometers south of Chennai, where the German Lutheran missionary Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg first landed on 9 July 1706.

An Unparalleled Contribution to Civil Society

In a keynote address to the seminar on the “Contribution of the Tranquebar Mission to Civil Society,” Dr S.P. Thyagarajan, vice-chancellor of the University of Madras in Chennai, praised Ziegenbalg’s “farsightedness” in bringing Indian and European cultures together. He had made an “unparalleled contribution” to strengthening the civil society, he said, and people should consider him as a “role model.” The missionary had “valued existing religions and wanted to bring out societal harmony.” He also had interpreted Tamil culture to Europe in portraying India’s rich heritage through his translations, Thyagarajan, a Hindu scholar, added.

The former director of the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archeology, Dr Ramachandran Nagaswamy, also highlighted Ziegenbalg’s sensitivity to the Indian context in carrying out his work. He pointed to the pains taken by the missionary to introduce Westerners to the richness of Tamil culture and literature. Missionaries of the time were known to require obedience to their beliefs and customs, whereas Ziegenbalg had first made the effort to learn Tamil and Tamil philosophy.

Speaking on the Tranquebar Mission’s contribution to education, Dr Bernard D’Sami of the Roman Catholic Loyola College in Chennai, observed that Ziegenbalg’s entire life had been devoted “to the pursuit of true wisdom.” For the missionary, the Roman Catholic professor said, school was an indispensable means for the development of the society. While Ziegenbalg had stressed “character formation” as one important component of education, D’Sami continued, Christians should also learn from him to make their schools more open to people of all castes and classes.

Dr Daniel Jeyaraj, a theologian and professor of World

Christianity, in Newton, Massachusetts, USA, underlined the mission's contribution to Indology. "Ziegenbalg wanted to empower people," and was even prepared in the process to expose the misdeeds of the local rulers at the time, he said. According to Jeyaraj, who chose "inculturation in Tranquebar" as the theme of his doctoral research, missionaries like Ziegenbalg had only enriched local culture and traditions. Any widespread prejudice against them, he continued, was due to the lack of study about their contribution. The uniqueness of Ziegenbalg's mission was to work with Indians, enabling them to articulate their fears and hopes, he affirmed.

Post-Modern Challenges to Christian Mission

The inaugural address of the July 5-6 international consultation on "Post-Modern Challenges to Christian Mission" was presented by Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The moderator was LWF Deputy General Secretary, Rev. Chandran Paul Martin. Hanson offered a description of what was meant by "post-modern," what Lutherans had to offer to Christian mission in the context of Ziegenbalg's contribution, and what themes emerged for study. In a pre-modern context, "Ziegenbalg's work is a powerful witness for the work that lies ahead of us," Hanson said. "More than anything, post-modern is a way of recognizing that the world is in a period of transition," he writes in his statement. "Ziegenbalg knew what it meant to be a theologian of the cross," standing with and living among the Tamil people of India.

"The roots of this church deeply planted 300 years ago continue to bear fruit as Lutherans in India remain steadfastly committed to being engaged in God's mission for the life of the world. You are clear that living the way of the cross calls you and the people of India to the liberation of all Dalits. Your

absolute resolve that all Dalit people must be granted human rights, dignity, and liberation, is a sign to the whole world that your discipleship is centered in the cross," Hanson wrote. "As people of faith, we cannot be in service without being in pursuit of justice."

In her keynote address to the consultation, Bishop Dr Margot Kässmann, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, Germany, noted that today, "The church that goes out and meets the people is a relevant church." She emphasized that amid a "rapidly secularizing context," not only in Germany, but also in India and other parts of the world, Christians should discern the spirit of the times. "We need to translate the Bible into the language of the secularized world so that faith becomes meaningful to the current generation," she said.

Concerns of Poor Should Become the Churches' Agenda

In the five panel discussions that followed, Dr William Stanley, director of the Integrated Rural Development of Weaker Sections in India (IRDWSI), pointed out that the "church has the duty to protect God's Creation," saying that environmental protection and conservation had to be a serious concern for the church. "The poor, the marginalized and the least powerful are those who suffer most from illness and pollution caused by environmental degradation," he said. As Christians we do have an ethical responsibility to "seek policy changes through advocacy and promote alternatives for sustainable initiatives."

Demanding greater recognition for women in church affairs, Dr Priscilla Singh, secretary for Women in Church and Society in the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) said, "History has proved that mission becomes a success only when it starts to include women," who at times had served without even being acknowledged as missionaries, or when mission had made it

a priority to empower them with knowledge and skills. To reiterate her plea, Singh urged the participants to pursue the model set by Ziegenbalg who gave women the opportunity to question and learn from him.

The church has an “impressive record” of developing human power for health care, according to Dr K.M. Shyamprasad, director of the National Lutheran Health and Medical Board in India, but “we have not responded to the current needs of the health-care sector of the country.” Even though India has the largest number of HIV cases in the world, Shyamprasad said, “the very mention of HIV and AIDS is anathema to the church, which equates it with sexual sin.”

“Will the church dare to break new paths and new inroads to solve (the) issues related to poverty, caste and gender, which perpetuate this disease and many others?” he asked.

*In closing remarks at the consultation, Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, executive secretary of the LWF National Committee in India asserted that: “The concerns of the poor should become the agenda of churches not only at the national and international levels, but at the local congregations also. *We need to revise the theological curriculum to make the pastors and others respond to new challenges.”*

Ziegenbalg died at the age of 36 on 9 July 1719 [Mistake. It was February 23, 1719]. He is buried at the New Jerusalem Church in Tranquebar.

[End of press release.]

1. What a jolt for a closing line! He died 40 yrs younger than I am right now!
2. Equally jolting is the Gospel-less summaries of what all the important people said at the celebration. NEVER ONCE—neither in memory of dear “young” Ziegenbalg, nor in the mandates drawn for mission in the future – does the term (or any of its synonyms) appear. Makes you wonder if any of these folks ever knew what Ziegenbalg himself thought he was doing as the first ever Reformation-rooted pastor to proclaim Christ and the Augsburg Aha! in India.
3. Could just be the blinders of the reporter. But I’m doubtful. For the items reported—even from the Lutheran speakers (my ELCA bishop included) – are the standard boilerplate of today’s ecumenical mission theology. And Christ’s explicit mandate about the Good News to be “preached in his name to all nations (namely) repentance and the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 24:46) doesn’t make the cut. You might expect the first “secular” Indian speakers to eschew that, but the Christian voices follow suit.
4. Again, it could be the specs of the LWF reporter that filtered it out, if any such explicit Gospel got publicity in the festivities. In a few days we’ll have a chance to double-check. Marie and I have a dear friend, a Baptist, Dan Nicholas, who was there for the hoopla. He’s a colleague from our days at the Overseas Ministries Study Center (New Haven CT) back in 2002. Besides being on site for the Tranquebar Tercentenary, Dan also went the extra mile to visit and photograph people and projects in India’s Manipur state, far to the northeast right up against Myanmar (Burma). God willing he’ll be back in Connecticut this weekend. From him we’ll get a second opinion. We think he knows what’s Gospel, and what isn’t, which the major speakers possibly don’t know.
5. Look at the laundry list of this “Lutheran Missionary’s

Legacy HAILED at Tranquebar Tercentenary Celebrations."

"An unparalleled contribution to Tamil civil society." Dr S.P. Thyagarajan, vice-chancellor of the University of Madras in Chennai, a Hindu scholar.

"Ziegenbalg's sensitivity to the Indian context in carrying out his work. He pointed to the pains taken by the missionary to introduce Westerners to the richness of Tamil culture and literature." Tamil Nadu State Department of Archeology, Dr Ramachandran Nagaswamy

"Christians should also learn from him to make their schools more open to people of all castes and classes." Dr Bernard D'Sami of the Roman Catholic Loyola College in Chennai

"Ziegenbalg wanted to empower people . . . enabling them to articulate their fears and hopes." Dr Daniel Jeyaraj, a theologian and professor of World Christianity, in Newton, Massachusetts, USA,

"Ziegenbalg's work is a powerful witness for the work that lies ahead of us . . . he knew what it meant to be a theologian of the cross, standing with and living among the Tamil people of India. [Speaking directly to Indian Lutherans] Your absolute resolve that all Dalit people [India's 200 million outcasts] must be granted human rights, dignity, and liberation, is a sign to the whole world that your discipleship is centered in the cross." [Ed: Theology of the cross is Gospel indeed, but the specifics that follow are not what it is.] Mark Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

"The church that goes out and meets the people is a relevant church. Christians should discern the spirit of

the times.” Bishop Dr Margot Kässmann, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, Germany

“Concerns of the poor should become the churches’ agenda. The church has the duty to protect God’s Creation . . . to seek policy changes through advocacy and promote alternatives for sustainable initiatives.” Dr William Stanley, director of the Integrated Rural Development of Weaker Sections in India

Demanding greater recognition for women in church affairs, she urged the participants to pursue the model set by Ziegenbalg who gave women the opportunity to question and learn from him. Dr Priscilla Singh, secretary for Women in Church and Society in the LWF Department for Mission and Development

India has the largest number of HIV cases in the world, Shyamprasad said, “the very mention of HIV and AIDS is anathema to the church, which equates it with sexual sin. . . . Will the church dare to break new paths and new inroads to solve (the) issues related to poverty, caste and gender, which perpetuate this disease and many others?” Dr K.M. Shyamprasad, director of the National Lutheran Health and Medical Board in India

“The concerns of the poor should become the agenda of churches not only at the national and international levels, but at the local congregations also. . . . We need to revise the theological curriculum to make the pastors and others respond to new challenges.”

Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, executive secretary of the LWF National Committee in India

6. Why did no one (apparently) HAIL Ziegenbalg's own prime reason for coming to India: To offer Christ as God's healing for the God-fracture that afflicts Hindus too as sons and daughters of Adam and Eve—and then to encourage them to trust him? I called the items mentioned by the speakers the “standard boilerplate” of what widely gets cited as the purpose of Christian mission in the 21st century. You've heard me grouse about this almost every time I report on a missiological conference somewhere in the world. Recently I found some Reformation rubrics to use here. All of the items in the laundry list above, all of them good stuff without a doubt, are “coram hominibus” realities, stuff on the human-to-human interface of our life in the world. But the Christic gospel is something else. It addresses the “coram deo” agenda, the God-and-sinner interface of our life in the world. Beginning with the opening chapters of the Bible, THAT interface is where the primal fracture is. If that doesn't get fixed, any fixing on the coram hominibus agenda is bound to be short-lived. The Gospel claims Christ as God's own offer to fix the primal fracture.
7. You would think that folks would start to notice that all the hype, all the drumbeat, to get busy fixing the coram hominibus fractures, is hype for a project that hasn't gotten better since humans began recording history. It hasn't improved in my lifetime, surely not the last few days since Haifa-Megiddo made the headlines. Nor since the New Testament era. Nor since Cain and Abel. Might it be that the coram hominibus agenda will never be really fixed until the coram deo agenda is? Yes, indeed. Just read the Bible. Stop-gap measures (God's operational law, said Luther) can minimize coram hominibus mayhem, but never cure it. Coram deo healing has to come first before coram hominibus healing can be real.

8. So if those Tranquebar celebrators were serious about the coram hominibus proposals they were making, at least the Christians among them should have hyped Ziegenbalg for what his own primal agenda was. Namely the coram deo interface. You can read it in his letter back home from Tranquebar. He thought that preaching Christ and getting Hindus to trust that good news, was the generator for all the “good stuff” that also arose on the coram hominibus interface in and around the mission station. Yes, he did indeed initiate a whole raft of such coram hominibus projects and institutions there on the east coast of India, some of which are still running today. But for him, they were all second-order consequences of his first agenda, his prime reason for going there (an 8-month hellish sea voyage!), and for undergoing all the Sturm und Drang—and there was plenty, not from the locals, but from Europeans, both in the colony and back home—of “only” 12 more years before his death at age 36: To offer Christ to those who’d never heard the offer before.
9. To us his family name may sound “funny.” Ziegenbalg, literally translated, is “a goat’s hide.” Neither of those two nouns has much pizzazz in our culture. Not much glory there, but possibly fitting for a theologian of the cross – Christ’s spokesman in a goatskin. Not too different from John the Baptizer and his camelskin wrap-around. Too bad that correlation wasn’t noticed last week at Tranquebar tricentenary. Whether in goatskin or camelskin the real “legacy” was the same: “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” A.k.a. the Christian Gospel. Maybe for the 400th.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Entry under “Ziegenbalg, Bartholomäus (1682-1719)” in the

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS, Gerald H. Anderson, ed. Eerdmans, 1998:

“Pioneer German missionary in South India. Ziegenbalg, the prototype of German pietist Lutheran missionaries, was born in Pulsnitz, Saxony. He had a conversion experience while in high-school, after the early loss of his parents. Repeated illness and inner conflicts interrupted his studies at Berlin and Halle. But under the guidance of the pietist leaders Joachim Lange and A.H. Francke, he underwent a demanding program of studies, including Greek and Hebrew, which was to stand him in good stead in India. When King Frederick IV of Denmark found little Danish interest in taking up mission work among non-Christian subjects overseas, he instructed his German court chaplain Franz J. Lütken to find suitable candidates in Germany. After consultation with Lange, Lütken was soon able to present Ziegenbalg and his fellow student Heinrich Plütschau, who were ordained at Copenhagen and arrived at the Danish trade establishment of Tranquebar, South India, on July 9, 1706.

“The mission depended in its formative years primarily on Ziegenbalg’s creative vision and ability. There was no end of difficulties, and Ziegenbalg’s own impetuosity was at least partly responsible. Yet often he seemed to grow under pressure, not least on account of his practice of dealing with unforeseen challenges by intensive prayer and by accounting for his actions in incredibly extensive reporting and correspondence.

“There was, first, the challenge of the local languages – Portuguese and, more urgently, Tamil. With the assistance of indigenous helpers, Ziegenbalg quickly acquired command of both the spoken and the written forms of Tamil, prepared dictionaries, published a grammar (1716), and collected Tamil manuscripts. He thus became a pioneer in the Western study of South Indian culture, society, and religion, although three of

his translations and his two major works on Hindu religion remained unpublished for a long time as they did not meet with approval at Halle. His translation of the Bible, on the other hand – the whole New Testament, for the first time in any Indian language, and the Old Testament up to the book of Ruth – was printed at Tranquebar on a Tamil press sent out from Halle. Tamil hymnbooks, catechisms, and other Christian literature followed. Schools for boys and girls were established, and a seminary for the preparation of Indian assistants was opened. All this underscored Ziegenbalg's conviction that the indigenous church would be Lutheran in faith and worship but Indian in character.

“However, a dispute over policy with the Danish mission secretary, Christian Wendt, undoubtedly contributed to his sudden death in 1719, before he had completed his thirty-sixth year. Much later it would be recognized that with him ‘a new epoch in the history of the Christian mission had begun’ (Stephen Neill).”

A Sermon Commending Repentance

Colleagues,

“Summertime. And the livin’ is easy.” So goes one of the American classics in George Gershwin’s opera PORGY AND BESS. Well, it really was not “easy” at all in the hardscrabble life of Porgy and Bess alongside Old Man River—even though “the fish were jumpin’ and the cotton was high.” But for this pensioned retiree, white not black, umpteen times more wealthy than Porgy and Bess, living a couple hundred miles upstream from them on the same Mississippi river, there is no

comparison from their life to the “ease” of mine. But that’s not where I intended to go when I started this paragraph with “Summertime.” I merely wanted to admit that I am taking the “easy” way for this week’s summer ThTh posting. To wit, it’s last Sunday’s sermon at Christ Lutheran Church in suburban St. Louis, where I was the guest preacher. For goldie-oldies it is sometimes an achievement to get just one thing done each week.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

July 9, 2006
Christ Lutheran Church
Webster Groves MO

Text Mark 6:1-13. Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

1 He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. 2 On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense [Greek verb says: “were SCANDALIZED”] at him. 4 Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’ 5 And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6 And he was amazed at their UNBELIEF.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them AUTHORITY over the unclean spirits. 8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10 He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11 If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' 12 So they went out and proclaimed that all should REPENT. 13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and HEALED them.

Strange text.

First paragraph. Jesus FAILS as evangelist right in his own home town. "He could not do deeds of power there . . . because of their unbelief."

Next paragraph he sends out his disciples to do the same job—and they SUCCEED.

[And in Mark's gospels the disciples are not exactly super-stars. Most often just klutzes. Yet here Jesus gives them their specs—cum "'authority"—and they pull it off—"cast out many demons, anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them."]

What gives? How does that compute?

Here's one possibility: Could be that when you are "scandalized" [the actual Greek term in the text] by Jesus, as his hometown folks and family were—"He's just one of us townies. We know all his relatives. He's nobody special. Although what he does/says is nothing we've ever seen/heard

before”—that amounts to the tripwire. When you’re turned off by Jesus, that amounts to what he himself labels “unfaith,” a vote of no confidence. And when you don’t trust Jesus, he’s helpless to help you. Thereafter he himself is “amazed,” shakes his own head in disbelief, that you don’t want his help.

What’s so SCANDALOUS about the help Jesus offers? Jesus says there is a precedent for his scandalous reception. It’s been the standard scenario when God sends a prophet. Specifically when God takes one of the home town kids and sends them right back to the town square, and they start out: “Hey, folks, God’s got a message for you. I’m authorized—worse than that, under orders—to tell you such and so. And the main message is ‘You have Got to Turn Around!’” The Biblical word for that is REPENT.

But there’s confusion these days about what that word REPENT means. “Feel sorry,” most folks think. NOT SO. Both in the OT and the NT—Hebrew and Greek languages—the word has nothing to do with feelings.

It’s a TRAFFIC DIRECTION verb.

“TURN AROUND. YOU’RE GOING THE WRONG WAY.”

Repent is addressed as much to your feet as it is to your head or heart.

UNREPENTANCE IS following this traffic sign: [Held up a standard NO U TURN road sign that Marie had created: Big RED circle. Black inverted “J” arrow in the middle. RED slash diagonal across the arrow. No actual words, just the image.]

REPENTANCE IS following this other sign. [Held up Marie’s equally big sign with GREEN circle and large black letters inside YES U TURN]

The folks in Jesus’ home town stuck to THIS (RED) traffic sign,

so salvation didn't happen. Where the disciples went, they held up THIS (GREEN) traffic sign. Folks followed it, and good things happened.

But apparently even for the disciples, it wasn't a piece of cake. In giving them their orders, Jesus signals that there may be towns where they'll get the same reception as he did in his hometown.—“will not welcome you, refuse to hear you....” Towns, cities, even countries!? Even our country, the USA?

At first it may sound strange to hear that the gist of the disciples' preaching was so simple:

“That all should repent.” PUNKT.

Nothing more is mentioned about sermon content.

Could be that Mark is already using shorthand. In his opening chapter, he has a one-liner with four segments to it. It comes from Jesus' own mouth, a summary of all that Mark intends to tell us: JESUS CAME TO GALILEE PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL OF GOD AND SAYING: “God's Time has come. God's Kingdom is Here. Repent. Trust the Good News.”

So when you hold up the “YES U TURN” sign, folks will naturally ask: FROM WHAT, TO WHAT?

TO the Good News, AWAY FROM any and all alternative road signs with their proposed “good newses.”

Repentance and the USA

In two days and two months it will be 9/11/2006. Five years since that day that jolted us all. But it didn't jolt us enough to follow THIS (GREEN) sign. And President Bush's press conference in Chicago on Friday continued holding up the other

sign: STAY THE COURSE! NO U TURN.

How can nations repent? you ask. Are there any examples?

There was one during the Civil War.

Abraham Lincoln, the first ever Republican [!] president, called for a national day of repentance in the middle of the Civil War. It was clear that God was raining down judgment on both sides. Congress agreed. Passed legislation. It happened!

There's one in the Bible—the book of Jonah.

The REAL miracle in the book of Jonah is not the prophet inside the big fish, but the Assyrian world-empire repenting when Jonah came and held up the GREEN sign. Everybody from Emperor to street-sweeper donned sackcloth and ashes, and God's doom didn't happen.

America is the only world-empire around these days. Things are imploding, but it's NO U TURN. Draw your own conclusions.

We may get sidetracked when we talk of nations repenting. Asking "Repent of what? What sin, what wrong, did we do that we should stop doing?" Check that out in the N.T. and you get a surprise. Never are people told to repent OF SOMETHING. It's just flat-out REPENT. Flat-out YOU'RE GOING THE WRONG WAY. TURN AROUND. FAST. It's like the Interstate: Someone going east-bound in the west-bound lane. If you don't make a U-turn and go the other way, you're gonna get killed.

Ditto for REPENTANCE. Check Luke 13. Catastrophes, 2 of them, had just happened. Tower of Siloam fell over and killed 18 people. Pilate carried out a blood-bath, massacring Galileans while they were at worship. Folks ask Jesus: How do you explain this? In both cases Jesus (in effect) says "simple." His actual words: "I tell you unless you repent, you will all likewise

perish." When God's judgment machine is coming down the highway and you are heading into it, "staying the course," you're gonna be roadkill.

Christ is the other lane in God's interstate, God's other way of trafficking with sinners. REPENT means get off the deadly highway and "U-turn" over to the other one. That's where the demons get cast out, the demons that tempt us to take the wrong highway and refuse to U-turn. "Yes, U turn" is where sick folks get healed.

We probably won't get our nation to repent here this a.m. Seems that lots of folks, our president included, don't think REPENT applies to us. To the terrorists, for sure, but not to us. But we Christians know that, as Bob Bertram coined the phrase, that is the "Pharisee heresy." Pharisees believe: "The sinners need to repent, we good guys do not."

Not so, says Jesus throughout the 4 Gospels. He calls ALL to repent. The flatout sinners to U-turn from their lawless lives and turn to him. The law-keepers to U-turn from their self-righteous lives and turn to him.

But of course, some people, possibly some nations too, ARE more righteous, less all-out wicked, than others. What about that? Jesus never disputes that when dealing with individual cases.

The question is: when you DO have real righteousness, what do you do with it? If you hang your heart on it, you're lost. In more than one parable Jesus shows that the self-righteous folks are "lost-er" than the sinners.

Flatout sinners have ONLY to leave their unrighteousness behind when they TURN to Jesus.

The Do-Gooder guys/gals have to leave their righteousness, their good stuff, behind when they TURN to Jesus.

We good gals/guys here in church this a.m. know what a

sacrifice THAT calls for.

But that's still what REPENT means for us good folks. So let's work on REPENT just among ourselves here at Christ-Lutheran. It could have benefits for our entire nation. God has been known to work with small numbers to achieve great things, with the remnant of a few faithful in ancient Israel to save the masses.

So let's check it out.

BAD NEWS

Step 1.

What road signs are we actually following, we folks here this a.m.? Our culture bombards us with other "road signs" every day. Many of them have the \$-sign on them. You know them.

RICHER IS BETTER.

CONSUME MORE.

HAVE FUN.

YOU DESERVE THIS GOODIE.

OR THE OLD SCHLITZ BEER COMMERCIAL: "YOU ONLY GO AROUND ONCE IN THIS LIFE, SO GRAB FOR ALL THE GUSTO YOU CAN." And a hand reaches out for a can of Schlitz. That's a Road Sign for how to "GO" in this life, especially if you know that we only GO around once.

Jesus once illustrated the alternative with hand-motions. Living this way (hands extended pulling everything in to yourself), he said, is a guaranteed way to lose your life. The RED sign.

Living this way (hands giving your life away) "for my sake and the Gospel" [the GREEN sign], he said, is the way you "save" it.

I'm just as hooked by these other road signs, as I imagine you

here today also are. They're not only outside me, but they're inside too. Most likely inside you also. It's a sign of our need for help. The help called REPENT.

But in this text the diagnosis is even worse than that.

Step 2.

Mark goes deeper: folks were "scandalized" at Jesus. Jesus' own deeper diagnosis is the hard word "Unbelief." That makes it personal. Not just ideas or concepts. But a Jesus-response. "You don't trust me. Your hearts are hanging on something else than my Good News." Jesus' own goal with us is frustrated. That means we don't get healed either. Just like those people in Nazareth, none of his "mighty deeds" happen to us. If we were once healed, we've moved back into the sick ward.

Step 3.

Deepest diagnosis of all. Stuck following the wrong road sign is being stuck in the sick ward, condemned to stay there. Even worse, CHOOSING the sick ward over the Healer. Leads to a Dead End. The demons, the unclean spirits win. These demons are not spooks or strange ghosts; they are the OTHER ROAD SIGNS that are all around us. And they DO have power. They do pull us. To follow the old signs—whatever they are—and make no U-turn, is not a "way of life," but the way of death. Jesus said so: "I tell you unless you repent—switch road signs—you will all likewise perish." So switching road signs is the way to go. But we need help. Big help.

Good News.

Step 4.

You've heard it umpteen times before—right here in Christ Lutheran worship. Jesus is that Big Help. Offering us that

Sweet-swap. "I'll take to myself your dead-end and give you life instead. I'll take the rap, you get the reprieve. I'll take your cursed stuff, you get my blessings. God's blessings!" Jesus keeps coming back to both types of non-repenters—those who could care less about worship this morning AND us clearly "more righteous," do-gooder gals and guys here in church. To both types he says "Trade yah! My righteousness for your accumulated unrighteousness, as well as my BETTER righteousness for your accumulated righteous achievements."

Step 5.

"Repent" is the one and only word we hear in this text that the disciples preached. We want to follow it right now. The GREEN sign. The very telling of the Jesus-story gives the energy to prompt us to switch road signs. Deserting the red sign, following the green one. Repent [turning away from other stuff] and Believe [turning to] the Good News.

Step 6.

We go back out into the world living by the GREEN sign, hustling the GREEN sign, commending it to others. "Calling others to repentance is not murky, gloomy stuff." Instead it's saying to friends: "Been there, done that, and it's a dead end. Turned away from that to Christ and his road signs. Schlitz sign is NOT where the gusto is. The Christ sign is. And talk about gusto! With Christ you get the Holy Gusto. That's a gust of Life from God, the gusto God himself runs on. And with that Gusto you don't just Go Around Once. On the back of the YES, U TURN road signs it says: "Guaranteed to last from here to eternity."

Christ offers us samples of his Holy Gusto—to eat and to drink—here on the altar in just a few minutes. It's all under the green sign where RED-sign demons (yours and mine) get cast

out, where sick folk (you and I) get healed. God's own GREEN revolution! Y'all come.

[Somewhere along the way I did tuck in (ad lib) the story about Luther's 1529 essay "Concerning War with the Turks," the name for Muslims in his day] Suleiman the magnificent had 600,000 Muslim troops outside the gates of Vienna, the eastern outpost of the Holy Roman Empire. He'd already ravaged much of SE Europe. Luther wrote an essay offering his fellow Christians "unwanted" advice. He said:

There are two enemies outside the gates of Vienna. Suleiman and God. And God is using Suleiman, surely a wicked man, as the "rod of my anger." That's the language God used (in Isaiah) when he sent the king of Assyria to take Israel into slavery. So two different strategies are needed for two very different enemies, though both are allies right now. With God as your enemy, only one thing will work: REPENT. Anything else and you're dead in your tracks. God is a patsy with repentant folks. He befriends them. He stops being their enemy If we No-U-turn European Christians repented , we would rob Suleiman of his SUPER ally. And then we might be able beat him if it's "only" a military conflict. But how to get the Holy Roman Empire to repent? Why not at least a few of us do it, who believe in the power of repentance? God's been known to listen to a small "remnant" of faithful folks and save even their unfaithful countrymen, just "for the sake of the righteous remnant."

So far Luther's essay. There were no polls in those days to find out if anybody repented. Let's suppose Luther and wife Katie and the kids did "repent" for Europe at supper that night around the table. Maybe a few other folks who read his

treatise. We don't know if they did, but what we do know is that the completely unexpected happened. Suleiman turned around at Vienna, didn't sack the city, and went back home to Istanbul.

Talitha Kumi in the Cuckoo's Nest

Colleagues,

I was asked to be guest preacher on July 2 at an ELCA congregation here in St. Louis. Not because I'm noted for "Fourth-of-July" homilies, but because the pastor, with away-from-home holiday already booked for the nation's 230th birthday, was desperate to find anybody who would say yes. So I said it.

But I didn't know what I was getting into. "Our tradition," the organist told me when I got there, "is to have special music when it's the 4th of July. Between the reading of the gospel and your sermon, we'll have an interlude where we sing patriotic hymns. First there'll be a soloist singing God Bless America. Then the congregation will repeat that hymn and then we'll all sing several more. Most of them are in the LBW. Oh yes, we always have a guest trumpet player to accompany the organ for this celebration. He's very good. And you'll see many of our members all dolled up in red, white and blue."

I wanted to run, but I didn't. I had anticipated in my sermon deliberations to "cross" the day's gospel with the Saturday

newspaper's headlines. That would have been jarring enough. The Gospel was Jesus' resurrecting Jairus' 12-yr old daughter "interrupted" by the adult woman surreptitiously touching his garment to be healed of her dreadful affliction. That was the good news. The bad news was the two front-page headlines in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch: "GIs probed in Iraq rape, killings . . . revealed during routine counseling session" and then right below it "Bring Fourth the festivities! Fair St. Louis opens today."

The disconnect between these two headlines with each other—rape and murder and then celebrate, both predicated to birthday-celebrating America—is as cavernous as is the disconnect between them and the day's Gospel. What was the headline-writer thinking when he pasted the two of them together? Probably no more than most of us readers did when we read them. "Oh, that's awful, but . . . it is the 4th of July. So we'll go with the second headline." Reminded me of Milton Mayer's stellar book "They Thought They were Free: The Germans 1933-45." Amazon.com commentators say this about it:

Mayer gives us a chilling look at Nazi Germany through conversations and interviews with ten self-described 'little men', who were all members of the party. The men tell of their beliefs and experiences during the years of the Third Reich. We hear them, in their own words, make their excuses and justifications and evasions, but the same question will not stop coming up in our minds: "What would I have done?" In some ways the scariest aspect of the book is how normal the men seem to be. Their Nazi beliefs are somehow more frightening as they do not come from high ranking officials like Himmler and Goebbels, but rather from ordinary civilians. To a man, they declared that their days under Hitler were the best in their lives. I found the parallels with current day America to be much too close for comfort. This book will open your eyes as to

how totalitarianism is welcomed by the mass of people if the media support it, and the economy is good.

I didn't refer to Mayer in the sermon, but you ThTh folks can think about it. I do remember one quote when I read his book years ago. One of his 10 "average Joes (Johanns)" said something like this: "Yes, Hitler did do some awful things. The first ones were small, but I didn't protest then. Next time he did something worse, but since I'd remained silent the previous time, this even worse action didn't seem THAT much worse, so I did nothing. Finally the awful things just rolled by me."

"GIs probed in Iraq rape, killings." It just rolls by. This is NOT God blessing America. Au contraire.

Here's what I tried to do in the sermon.

When the patriotic singing ended I began by saying that it would be jarring to cross the Gospel (read 10 minutes earlier) with the America texts we'd just been singing. But that was what their pastor asked me to do for them: to link the mark 5 text to the text of our own lives on this 4th of July weekend 2006. Most of us DID indeed know that the "alabaster cities gleaming" may perhaps have been true a century ago when these hymns were written, but that just in our own town of St. Louis there are stretches of wasteland that are anything but alabaster. Lots of things are not gleaming in America today. The hymns may reflect our nostalgia, but our nation—like those two women in the text—is afflicted with sickness. We need "talitha kumi."

I then read the newspaper headlines out loud. Is that sickness, or what? And the two headlines side-by-side. Is that schizophrenia, bi-polar, or what?

I had previously decided to go with mental illness as the

metaphor for our national malady—and also that of us here this morning—torn between our habitual patriotism and the realities of such a headline all on the same weekend. And I opted for the title of Ken Kesey's book/play of days gone by "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" for my illness metaphor, reminding the congregation that in that play you couldn't tell who was crazy and who was not. Not only among the patients, but also among the staff of the mental hospital. You expect the patients to be crazy and the staff to be sane, but in this Cuckoo's Nest that line zig-zagged through both groups. So who's crazy, who's sane, in our national life? Hard to tell. You thought whatzisname was the "good guy," sane (the Latin word for healthy), and his nay-sayers were crazy. But then out comes this new revelation, and the zig-zag shifts. The cuckoo's nest for all of us US citizens is not that "some" are crazy, but that often you can't tell who is, who isn't.

So let's take Jesus' "sane" words "Talitha kumi," and cross them to our cuckoo's nest.

Talitha Kumi in Our Cuckoo's Nest.

Perhaps you don't think our national scene is a cuckoo's nest. I won't argue.

But we all have our personal versions: Where's your cuckoo's nest, where it's just crazy?

Your own daily life. Your family. The neighbors. The workplace. Just inside your head.

Sane/insane means healthy/sick. Talitha kumi are Jesus' words for getting from crazy to sanity.

In Kesey's Cuckoo's nest, both the patients and the staff survived (if I remember it right) by creating little "oases of

sanity” where they could “live” in the otherwise insane world of the mental hospital.

That’s almost a Biblical insight. Right out of today’s text. Jesus does not bring healing to the masses. Only in the corner of Jairus’ home does sanity happen. Neighbors who laughed at him are excluded from this oasis. Ditto for the older woman. Right in the middle of the mob, she touches Jesus and there’s an oasis in the desert, her desert.

“Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” Sanity after the insanity of many doctors and all her money. And fundamental to it all, Jesus’ “Peace,” namely, God-relationship-sanity healing the hemorrhaging of God-disconnect insanity.

But let’s take it one step at a time. [Herewith the Crossings paradigm]

The Bad News—

1. The cuckoo’s nest in Mark 5: Both of the afflicted are women. Both suffering. Point of death for one. Papa desperately begging. Insanity zig-zagging through their lives.
 2. The heroes in the story are ones whom Jesus links to “faith.” But not so the crowds, even the klutzy disciples, worst of all those who “laugh at” Jesus’ therapeutic analysis. His own depth-diagnostic term is “fear,” the antithesis of faith. That’s the temptation confronting Jairus, and the afflicted woman. In fear, driven to trust all other kinds of M.Ds for sanity and distrust the genuine healer.
 3. Distrusters wind up “put outside.” No oasis for them. Just more insanity. Eternal cuckoo’s nest. Total God-disconnect. Permanent.
- #### The Good News—

4. The Healer, peace-creator, the Sanitizer. The oasis-creator. The craziness of God's son to join the crazies in the cuckoo's nest. He sweet-swaps the unhealth/insanity of both women for his healing sanity. What's all involved in that transfer, of course, is Good Friday and Easter. Twice the reference to touch, the point of that sweet-swap transfer. Jesus gets their infections; they his health.
5. "Fear not, only trust." Faith in Christ replaces fear's inverse kind of faith that trusts other clinicians for coping with the cuckoo's nest. What's the nature of "faith" in this text? The faith Jesus commends is a) confidence that Jesus CAN provide the help, and b) that He WILL DO IT for me, unclean, near death tho I be.
6. Back into crowd of daily life, living from the corner of sanity, the Christ oasis. Living by Christ's continuing "Talitha kumi" in the cuckoo's nest.

Crossing over to us folks here this morning at X-Lutheran Church:

1. Pick your own cuckoo's nest. Where sickness, even insanity, seems to be in charge. Your own begging. Helpless. Maybe even 12 yrs already. Or a whole lifetime.
2. How "natural" to respond with fear. [Terrorists know the power of fear. Are they not winning? What drove those GIs to rape and murder? Is Iraq a cuckoo's nest or what? Is the USA?] But to be driven by fear disconnects us from Christ. It's really that simple. Either "fear or faith." He says so. But fear is not something you can exorcise on your own. Outside help is needed, big help.
3. When fear invades our Christian hearts, it puts us "outside." Cut off from Christ's oasis. Permanent cuckoo's nest. Getting healed:
4. Jesus comes to our cuckoo's nest. The Healer, peace-creator, the Sani-tizer. Who sweet-swaps our

unhealth/insanity for his healing sanity. What's all involved in that transfer, of course, is Good Friday and Easter. Twice the reference to touch, the point of that sweet-swap transfer.

5. Today he's in our cuckoo's nest too, offering us that touch once more to unload our frazzled selves and come into his oasis. His offer: Fear not; just trust. Namely, "just" trust me. Touch me and keep touching. Faith puts us in God's oasis. From that oasis we too can cope with the insanity around us—even inside us. He even makes that offer to the GIs in the headline. That's how crazy his offer is.
6. Daily life as Talitha kumi in the Cuckoo's Nest. Getting up again each morning. and moving out as Christ's "daughter." Which means God's own daughter too. Taking the oasis with you, this little piece of healed life back out into the crazy world. When insanity surrounds you, TOUCH Christ again. PEACE comes with Talitha Kumi. In Christ's oasis you're in the right place WITH GOD. That what "Shalom" is all about every time Jesus mentions it. The goodies follow. "Give her something to eat," Jesus said. Daily nourishment from the oasis for life back out in the cuckoo's nest.

Christ has "something to eat" (and drink too) on the altar for us here this morning. Even on this crazy 4th of July weekend when we want to be patriotic, but know that's no oasis for survival. So let's join him—and each other—at the table. "Talitha kumi," he says to us. "Daughters (and sons) of mine, get up and come to the table." With this nourishment we can cope with any cuckoo's nest. He said so. His words to Jairus are his promise to us: Don't be afraid, just trust me.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

The Holy Gust on Skid Row—But Hardly a Surprise

Colleagues,

Brian Heinrich has been on these cyber-pages before. [Try “Brian” on the Crossings website internal Google engine to see how often.] He’s the “street priest” of the Lutheran Urban Mission Society [LUMS] on the seamy “East Side” [=Skid Row] of Vancouver, British Columbia. Brian’s a native Canadian, Seminex-grad (’83), my Teaching Assistant at that time in systematic theology. He was stellar then; even more so now. To see/read the details for yourself GO to the LUMS website <www.lums.ca> On Pentecost Sunday this year Canadian Anglicans publicly linked up with this Augsburg Confession Catholic by placing Brian on the Vancouver Cathedral roster as one of their own. We once spent a morning with him on the streets with his people. It was a different seminary from the one where I (allegedly) was Brian’s teacher. But where else can gusts blow, the Holy One included, if not out in the open, outside the walls? Which is Brian’s point below, his June 2006 LUMS message on Street Ministry. Read on. Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

STREET MINISTRY

VENI SANCTE SPIRITUS

When the Spirit came & filled them on Pentecost the apostolic community spilled out onto the street effervescently overflowing.

The Spirit is that unconstrainable “idiom” of God that “bloweth where it listeth” (John 3:8), uncaged & undomesticated. The Spirit is that idiom of God that defies being boxed & conveniently compartmentalized.

For example, while we regularly use the masculine pronoun to describe God, & we do have both the masculine gendered Father & the Son, the word for Spirit in both principal biblical languages is feminine. [Brian’s apparently carried away grammatically—perhaps by the Holy Gust. “Pneuma” in Greek is a neuter noun, neither masculine nor feminine.] She refuses to conveniently fit into our limited descriptors.

Fire, Wind & Water, three of the four primordial elements, are used to represent the Spirit, & it is worth noting it is the three elements that are the most instable & mercurial that symbolize the Spirit. Neither fire, wind nor water is easily held. They slip through our fingers ungrasped. They are not as solid as earth.

Trying to grasp fire one is most likely to get singed! Cf. the prophetic text Peter exegetes in his first pentecost sermon—(Acts 2:17ff)/Joel 3:1-5 (but especially verses 3 & 4!) You can smell the smouldering doom! The Spirit isn’t to be messed with! The Spirit should come with a warning label like we might see on household products: Danger! Flammable, BEWARE spontaneous combustion might occur!

Pentecost is the anniversary of my ordination (’83), confirmation (’69) & baptism (’54), & now this year I became

an affiliate priest at Christ Church Cathedral [The Anglican center in Vancouver, British Columbia] on Pentecost as part of the LUMS/CCC covenant. I was invited to preach for the Pentecost liturgies at CCC, where I warned the parents & sponsors of the infants being baptized that morning of the dangerous thing they were up to. Those baptized were immersed into Christ's death & singed by His Spirit. When my unknowing parents brought infant Brian to the font fifty-odd years ago little did they realize the potential. God took what they offered & I stand before you today as street priest. Don't mess with the fiery Spirit!

The Spirit nudged the fledgling apostolic community out from behind their locked-from-the-inside conclave, spilling them out onto the street. The Spirit shoved them out from hiding in their fears & filled & enabled them. "We are not inebriated (Acts 2:13ff) as you might suppose," Peter proclaims, "but enthused" [Greek: "en-theos-ed," God-filled]. And the whole rest of the book of Acts ("of the Apostles," but sometimes perhaps better called "the Acts of the Holy Spirit") it is the Spirit that drives & motivates the mission. It is the Spirit ("of Jesus" as the book of Acts consistently identifies Her) who directs where the missionaries shall & shan't go (Acts 13:2,3,4; 16:6-10).

It is the unconstrained Spirit of Jesus who defies the bounds of normal geography so that the newly deaconed Philip can be in the right place at the right time (Acts 8). It is the Spirit, that person of our God who colours outside the lines, who pushes the resistant early Hebrew Christian community to dare considering what was abhorrent to them, namely, welcoming & including aliens, foreigners, outsider, gentiles into the community (Acts 10ff). A huge transition, the impact of which cannot be overestimated on the fledgling apostolic community! And reminiscent of our own current struggles around inclusion

of the threatening other.

At the end of the book of Acts the Spirit-driven mission reaches Rome, “the centre of the universe,” but the intent is clear: this is not a terminus, but instead this is the launch point for the continuing ramifications of the resurrection exploding out in expanding ripples to embrace the whole cosmos (cf. Mk. 16:15). So I lament as I ask myself, why is it today that the community of Jesus is popularly identified as being conservative, retrenchant, & even retrogressive, rather than Spirit nudged, peripheral & radical—almost inebriated (but actually enthused), downright edgy! Like the Spirit who animates us, wild & fierce.

We invoke the unconstrained Spirit at ordinations. There is a beautiful moment in the ordination liturgies where just before the bishop articulates the consecrating prayer the rites call for silent prayer. More is about to happen here than mere words can contain, only the ineffability of silence can say this. We dare not bind the Holy in this sacred moment.

There is a telling conclusion in the chapter “The Forms of the Ordained Ministry” in the renowned ecumenical document of the World Council of Churches: “Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry” [BEM]. After carefully couching all ministry in the context of the whole community, BEM goes on to articulate a preference for the threefold ministry of deacons, presbyters, & bishops; but then lastly it concludes under the title “Variety of Charisms”—“(t)he community which lives in the power of the Spirit will be characterized by a variety of charisms. The Spirit is the giver of diverse gifts which enrich the life of the community . . . (t)he ordained ministry, which is itself a charism, must not become a hindrance for the variety of these charisms. On the contrary, it will help the community to discover the gifts bestowed on it by the Holy Spirit & will

equip members of the body to serve in a variety of ways. . . . In the history of the Church there have been times when the truth of the Gospel could only be preserved through prophetic and charismatic leaders. Often new impulses could find their way into the life of the Church only in unusual ways. At times reforms required a special ministry. The ordained ministers and the whole community will need to be attentive to the challenge of such special ministries."

In other words, we must make allowances for the uncontainable Spirit who keeps bursting out of the institutions we construct & Who will not be constrained & promises to keep taking us places beyond our imaginations, places we least expect!

In conclusion, I would be negligent if I didn't capitalize upon the detail that the Spirit nudged the first pentecosted community out ONTO THE STREET as the initial place of witness & mission. VENI SANCTE SPIRITUS, reanimate us in your mission in places we ourselves dare not go by ourselves.

*Your street priest
pastor brian*

American Society of Missiology, Annual Meeting 2006

Colleagues,

This past weekend for the umpteenth time I was north of Chicago at Techny Towers (RC retreat center) for the annual meeting of the American Society of Missiology [ASM].

I want to tell you about the weekend.

1. There are 400 or so members in the ASM. They span the ecumenical denominational rainbow. The society was consciously crafted that way at the very beginning nearly 40 years ago. How these folks found each other in the first place, I don't really know. But somehow, somewhere, in the USA missiologists who were Roman Catholics, "Evangelical-Independent," and "Conciliar" (= folks from mainline denominations who are members of the World Council of Churches) were in the same place at the same time and created the ASM. That tri-partite parsing of the ecumenical spectrum still prevails. Presidents are elected in a three-year rotation according to these rubrics. Outgoing president was RC Stephen Bevans. New prez is independent Darrel Whitemann. Prexy-elect for a year from now is Presbyterian Darrel Guder. Boards have members equally balanced according to the same ecumenical arithmetic.
2. A few of the surviving founders, now octagenarians, were at this year's get-together. They get red-carpet treatment. No longer alive from that pioneer group is Bill Danker, the first ever "missiologist" in the Missouri Synod. Bill was my colleague at Concordia Seminary and then at Seminex. He "converted" me [his verb] to missions back in the 70s, thus rescuing me from the limbo of being "just" a prof. of systematic theology. Even though I was an outsider—never having been a "real" missionary "in the field"—he dragged me to some of the early ASM meetings. They eventually accepted me as a member. Bill then dragged me further to the international version of the same,

International Association for Mission Studies [IAMS], and I've been missiologically enmeshed – or is it infected? – ever since. About 25 years, I think.

3. People still ask “what’s missiology?” The “-logy” part of the word is academic convention, like psycho-logy, bio-logy, socio-logy. The missiologists make Christian missions the focus of their teaching and research. They do the same thing with their subject matter that sociologists do with society. It’s that simple.
4. Lutheran mission theology at the national and international gatherings is a minority voice. And Lutherans don’t show up at these gatherings in any great numbers either, sad to say. Among the 150 or so of us at Techny this past weekend, I found only one other Lutheran. There are 16 ASM members (4%) in the directory with clearly “Lutheran” addresses. Although I’ve been around long enough to be one of the bunch in the give-and-take of discussion and debate, I’ve never been asked to be on the program. The “other” Lutheran at this year’s event, Frieder Ludwig (Luther Seminary, St. Paul MN), was on one of the panels this time, but not by virtue of being Lutheran. One Lutheran on the ASM roster regularly tweaks me when I bemoan such matters: “Let’s face it, Ed, Lutheran missiology is an oxymoron.” ThTh receivers know I hold an op ed perspective on this.
5. But Luther did get quoted for support in two of the major presentations—surprise, surprise—from supposedly quite different places on the theological spectrum, neither of them normally associated with Blessed Martin. One was the opening statement of Roman Catholic Steve Bevans’ presidential address, “The Church as Creation of the Holy Spirit.” The other was the closing statement by Assemblies of God seminary president Byron Klaus in his address “Pentecostalism and Mission.” Steve’s Luther said: “It is

the proper work of the Holy Spirit to make the church.” Byron quoted from the last verse of Luther’s A Mighty Fortress: “The Spirit and the gifts are ours; their might with us abideth” – apparently an AoG version of the hymn verse.

6. “Pentecostalism and Mission: From Azusa Street to the Ends of the Earth” was the ASM theme this year. Except for the president’s address, all the presentations came from Pentecostal folks. “Azusa Street,” as some of you may know, refers to the revival in Los Angeles and the Pentecostal “outbreak” that happened there in 1906. So it’s 100 years. Azusa Street is considered by many to be the birthplace of Pentecostalism; the pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission there, William Joseph Seymour, the church-father of the movement.
7. Here’s the entry on Seymour in the Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission (p.613) “(1870-1922) African American Pentecostal pastor and leader of the Apostolic faith Mission. Born in Louisiana to former slaves, and raised as a Baptist, he later joined the holiness movement, adopting its belief in the entire sanctification and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the imminent return of Christ. In 1905 he came into contact with Charles F. Parham [sc., born the next county over from the Schroeder family farm!], leader of a Midwestern Pentecostal movement. After adopting Parham’s teaching that God would bestow the gift of tongues [i.e., known human languages] on Spirit-baptized believers to expedite world evangelism, he moved to Los Angeles. Beginning in 1906 his band of followers met in a former African Methodist Episcopal church on Azusa Street for prayer and renewal, which led to the launching of the Apostolic Faith Mission. News of the Azusa Street revival and restoration of the gifts of the Spirit quickly spread around the world through the pages

of THE APOSTOLIC FAITH, edited by Seymour, and also through the ministries of persons who traveled from there across America and overseas."The uniqueness of this revival, the most influential of the century in terms of global impact, includes its eschatological orientation, spirituality, and interracial and intercultural makeup. . . . Seymour affected the worldwide course of the Pentecostal movement and became revered, especially among African American Pentecostals, for his emphasis on love and reconciliation as a witness of the Holy Spirit."

8. So we learned about Azusa Street and what's happened since then—also from Pentecostal voices out of Asia, Africa and Latin America, some historically linked to Azusa Street, some not. They all had those fancy academic initials behind their names, as did the rest of us. Pentecostals are not sitting in the back of the bus. The last speaker from the tradition was Amos Yong, systematic-theology-and-mission (hmm!) professor at Regent University (Virginia Beach, VA) "pushing the envelope with my own fellow Pentecostals," as he said, as he spun out a compelling scenario for "Pentecostalism and Interreligious Dialogue—Challenges and Opportunities." Some of us used to think that inter-religious dialogue was reserved for the eggheads. That may still be the case, but there are Pentecostal eggs in the basket.
9. Some ThTh readers probably know of the explosive growth in our day of Pentecostal Christian numbers throughout the non-Western world. Others of you may not. The statistics are stunning. Here are some numbers from David Barrett, the guru of "missiometrics" today. [See his website www.WorldChristianDatabase.org for more.]When Azusa Street happened a century ago, less than a million Christians worldwide called themselves "Pentecostal, charismatic, or neoevangelical." This year 600 million

(yes, that's the number) Christ-confessors use those words to identify themselves. Worldwide Lutheranism is around 80 million—and many of these also come under the Pentecostal rubric. One example of that is the (Lutheran) Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia with its several million members—most of whom, from what we learned when we worked there, would call themselves “charismatic.”

10. Back to the Luther quotes from the non-Lutheran conference speakers. When Steve Bevans began his presidential oration with his Luther quote, I blinked my eyes. What's up? I wondered. He's one of the dear “separated brothers”—originally the Pope's designation for us non-Roman Catholics—with whom I've been discussing (better, arguing) for years about mission theology at ASM assemblies. He and his colleague Roger Schroeder at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago recently put it all together in a tome that is becoming the contemporary classic: “Constants in Context. Theology of Mission for Today.” ThTh offered a two-part review last year. If interested,

GO

to <https://crossings.org/thursday/2005/thur070705.shtml> and <https://crossings.org/thursday/2005/thur071405.shtml>

Steve and my continuing taffy-pull is about the Kingdom of God. Even with the Luther quote, it didn't seem to me that Steve got very close to what the Reformer proclaims God's kingdom to be, let alone what the NT says. For a quick look see Luther's explanation of “Thy kingdom come” in his small and large catechisms. Steve teased that he'd started with the Luther quote just to make me happy. I countered that a piece I've written for the next issue of CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION (Aug. 2006), “The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Mark,” is really intended as my next step in our pas-de-deux. He said he'd read it when it appears.

11. When Byron Klaus concluded his “Pentecostalism and Mission” presentation with words from A Mighty Fortress, I blinked again. So I asked him in the Kaffee-klatsch thereafter, why the Luther citation? With his impressive scholarly credentials he knew, as did I, that Luther was not at all friendly to the “charismatics” of his day. “Here’s why, Ed,” he said. “When I was pastor of an Assemblies of God church here in Chicago years ago, we had many once-upon-a-time Lutherans in our congregation. But even apart from that, we had Luther’s ‘A Mighty Fortress’ in our hymnbook. And whenever we sang it, the rafters shook, not just because of the one-time Lutherans. It was our confession. And the rafters really vibrated when we got to the Christ-confession in the last verse: ‘The Word shall not depart from us, He ever with us sideth. The Spirit and the gifts are ours; their might with us abideth.’ Since Luther is so ‘mighty’ with his Christocentrism in that hymn, he has to be right on the Holy Spirit too.”

As surprising as it may seem, I was speechless. I finally did muster a Hallelujah.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Cross-winds at Pentecost

Colleagues,

All the “paid pastors,” and the intern too, at Bethel

Lutheran (St. Louis) were attending our ELCA synod assembly on Pentecost last (June 4). So Sunday service leadership was handed over to two goldie oldie retirees, octogenarian Karl Boehmke (celebrant) and 70-something Ed Schroeder (preacher). We added 40-something Sherman Lee to make a troika, and (while the cat's away, the mice will play) Sherm read a slice-of-(his own)life as one of the three lessons. Thereafter Sherm and I did a pas-de-deux "Crossings" sermon. It went like this: The Pentecost story (Acts 2) was the "grounding" text. Sherm's slice-of-life was the second text, "tracking" his life at work and at home for the week just ended. Our sermon-duet was the "crossing," weaving the two texts together.

Since Sherm is a Crossings community veteran, he knows the shout. Not only how the paradigm, the six-step Crossings matrix, works, even more he knows law/promise theology, the glue that holds the scheme together. So a good bit of my part of our sermon conversation was in the interrogative mood, with Sherm himself speaking the indicative sentences that did the crossing.

Sherm had written his "life-text" in advance and read it from the lectern as the second of the three readings for the Festival Day—Acts 2, the epistle from Sherman and then the Pentecost Gospel from John. I had composed a six-step sequence from the Acts 2 Pentecost text itself and that was printed in the service folder. We had agreed to use the "wind" of Acts 2 as our major metaphor, which is, of course, the root image of both the Hebrew and Greek words for Spirit. Our give-and-take sermon, tying the two texts together around this image—moving air, wind, breath, the Holy Gust—was ad lib. We stood before the congregation (cum cordless mikes) and "just talked."

Oh, yes, there was one visual aid. It sought to signal the job-description Jesus gives for the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel for Pentecost: "He will testify on my behalf. . . he will take what

is mine and declare it to you.” We placed a household box-fan on the baptismal font. Directly in front of it was the processional cross that one of our members had created for Easter this year, with Christ’s victory visualized by flowing streamers—gold, silver, red—attached to the multiple crossbars. When the fan was clicked on—as it was during the entire liturgy—it blew those victory streamers out toward the congregation. It might have been a bit hokey, but they got it.

At lunch thereafter, we reflected on what happened, asked which of us should “write it up.” Sherm volunteered. So here are the three pieces for this week’s ThTh:

*Ed’s six-steps for Acts 2,
Sherm’s slice-of-life,
Sherm’s reconstuction of how the stories went when we criss-
crossed them into each other.*

Peace and Joy!
Ed Schroeder

GROUNDING

Acts 2 in a Crossings matrix

Diagnosis

- 1. Daily Wind Pressure*
- 2. Gets Inside*
- 3. Get Blown Away*

A New Prognosis

4. Cross-Wind of Easter and Pentecost
5. Getting This Second Wind
6. Blowing in the Second Wind

TRACKING

Slice of Life

"Priorities. Get your priorities straight." I remember my father lecturing me about that when I was about my children's age. It was part of growing up, part of maturing. I think I've gotten pretty good at it, but it's hard to tell. Obviously things seem to be going well, but that's just on the surface. Everything seems to be in balance, but one little thing can upset that .

There's so much that I need to do, so much I want to do, so much that's expected of me and so little time. Time marches on relentlessly, or perhaps more accurately, it flows like water or wind. Most of the time it streams gently, but sometimes harshly, battering me around or stranding me in its wake, leaving me out of breath, out of sync, or simply just out of it.

Trying to keep priorities balanced is a lot like juggling, keeping all the balls in the air so nothing gets dropped. And life, like the wind, tends to shift – faster/slower, north/south, east/west, down/up – all the time. Most professional jugglers use heavy objects so that wind effect is negligible. But what if I'm juggling wiffleballs on a windy day, or if the wind kicks into hurricane or tornado mode? In other words, what can I do when the speed of life blows my world out of its orbit so that I can't even tell which way is up? How can I keep priorities straight, without missing something important?

Like this week, when I remembered that I had promised to help Ed with this sermon and thought that I had had plenty of time to do it. Like all busy weeks, this wasn't the best time to pile on with another special project. And this week was worse because all four-day work weeks [Memorial Day holiday had "taken" Monday] require five days of productivity. And the end of the month [Wednesday was May 31] always means extra project deadlines. On top of this, our air conditioner at home broke down; thankfully we've been sleeping at a neighbor's cool house, but even this requires extra planning and extra time. And then after my planning session with Ed I went to the dentist to diagnose some recent severe pain – yup, an emergency root canal. Dead stop for productivity. I was just happy to remove the recurring pain and numb the post-operative pain, return to normal biological function, forget about trying to get things done.

How to deal with this?

Of course, I could sleep less, but that's not enough. Something else has got to give, things aren't going to get done, balls are going to get dropped. I'm not the kind of person to simply not care and ignore everything. And I'm not the kind of person who will sacrifice myself to get everything done. I do know that somehow with God's love, I can try my best and everything will be all right. Like that common saying "Let go and let God." But even having the knowledge that God forgives me my sins and that the footprints in the sand – the two sets (mine and Jesus) that taper to one set – are not Jesus abandoning me, but rather Jesus carrying me—well, I still feel like this not getting everything done, in these tornadoes of ever-increasing deadlines and expectations, as calm as I appear on the outside, well, it's just killing me on the inside.

CROSSING

Daily Wind Pressure or Wind Shear

In the best of times, the most we can hope for is some sort of equilibrium of time demands vs. available time and energy. But all these demands, whether truly urgent or not, are like wind shear – the phenomenon of intense wind pushing everything into the ground. Unlike grounding us in Scripture, the wind shear pushes us into the ground, grinding us up. Although my slice of life barely touched on external symptoms, the palpable effects of wind-blown imbalance have included short temper, increased blood pressure, fatigue, and while actually giving my slice of life during the service – temporary dizziness – literally loss of balance.

Wind Gets Inside (Cutting Wind) or Vain Wind

In all the priorities, met and mostly unmet, I focus on a wind or spirit that is not God's. That's not to say that my needing to fulfill a commitment to my son's judo club or daughter's dance school, or especially completing office projects are not from God. But that I let them rule my thinking and let my obsession of the unfulfilled responsibilities haunt even the "downtime" moments is a harsh wind that cuts me to the core, like a polar blast. These obsessions are what I hang my heart on, or as Luther put it so well, those are my gods, false ones. And to add insult to injury, I try to take on all the responsibility myself: how vain of me to think I can go it alone. More harmful than the other false winds is the vain wind, when I try to take the place of God in my life.

Get Blown Away or Dust in the Wind

Whenever I get to the third of the six Crossings steps I think of my many relatives and friends who do not know and/or accept God's gift to us in Christ. Because a lot of what I wrote above can be soothed by many things like meditation, therapy, heart-to-heart talk with a friend or a good night's sleep. But the truth is that I believe that God created me and does not intend for me to suffer from the above-mentioned "Wind Shear" or "Vain Wind." I believe that God does not intend for me to fall victim to false gods (including myself) but that I do leaves me with a big problem. The grinding wind pummels me so hard that I lose God's breath (from the same root words as spirit and wind) – literally and figuratively. I lose the breath of life, literally no in-spir-ation. I am totally blown away, no more than dust in the wind, as in ashes to ashes. And as big as my problem is to me, it's at least that big for God. God doesn't intend for me to be blown away as dust in this killing wind; God aspires (another "spirit" word) much more for me.

Cross Wind: Easter & Pentecost or the Breath of New Life

Again I think of my relatives and friends for whom God-in-Christ is not currently a choice or an option. They may know of the story of the Cross and the Resurrection but it's not something they've accepted for themselves. I can't tell them The Truth; all I can do is tell them what's true for me: that on that Cross, God-in-Christ slayed the killing winds. This Cross-Wind, with the Resurrection, provides the breath of new life. It's a new wind blowing, one that not only soothes, but eradicated the death and dying associated with the old winds.

Getting This Second Wind or Alive with Re-spir-ation

This life-renewing wind or spirit or breath takes the clay that I am and literally and figuratively blows into me, in-spires me, enables me to have fully functional respiration. I am no

longer just clay and earth and water; I am breathing in/with/throughout the Spirit of God-in-Christ, the conqueror of the killing winds. No more shortness of breath; gone are the dizzy spells; I have the True Second Wind to sustain and nourish me through the chaos of the killing winds.

Blowing in the True Second Wind or the Holy Wind Vane

This sixth of the six Crossings steps is almost as hard to describe as the third. Who's to say that my outward calm demeanor is not the result of massage, meditation or bicycling, which all have restorative effects (for me)? It's not like I can go around telling people, that is the equivalent of shouting from the rooftops, "Hey I beat the over-scheduling stress problem with religion," or at least that's not how I'm wired. But if someone comments on how well I got through a rough patch, I can share this story, that is, how Christ's story intertwines with mine. Or if someone asks me what my weekend plans are and I tell them I'm going to be part of a sermon – well you never know exactly where that could lead, except it paves the way to share God's truth for me. And with the Spirit blowing in, through and around me (and not pushing me to the ground), with others I can share God's good news in my life and point the way to the True Second Wind – acting as a Holy Wind Vane, pointing The Way for others.