

The Trinitarian Dogma

Colleagues,

This coming Sunday is the Festival of The Holy Trinity. Herewith some random reflections.

1. There is a LCMS congregation here in St. Louis whose official name is "Saint Trinity Lutheran Church." Usually saints are human beings. This time it's the deity. The current pastor explains the curiosity this way: in the late 1800s a Concordia Seminarian, wanting to help "Heilige Dreifaltigkeits Lutherische Kirche" become more English-friendly, looked into his German-English dictionary and found that the noun "Heiliger" = Saint. "Heilig" as adjective is "holy." But he opted for the noun. None of the other German members objected, and so it has been ever since—Saint Trinity.
2. On a more serious note: The doctrine of the Trinity has become a hot topic in academic theology in the last couple of decades. Some of the leading names are Lutheran, but there are Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Reformed Protestants also active in the discussion. In my "senior years" I've not tried to keep up with it. There's just too much and I don't read very fast. And some of it that I have peeked into is fairly arcane so far as I can tell. I let former students (such as Gary Simpson, prof at Luther Seminary in St. Paul MN) keep me posted about some of what's going on.
3. Karl Barth and Karl Rahner—Swiss and German, Reformed and Roman Catholic, resp., two Goliaths of 20th century theology—are credited with pushing the Trinity back onto the agenda. More recent—and still living—are such "new trinitarians" as Juergen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg,

Robert Jenson, Eberhard Juengel, John Ziziouelos, Catherine LaCugna, Ted Peters and Elizabeth Johnson.

4. In a recent major paper for a mission theology conference (Fall 2005) at his seminary Simpson has unpacked the outlines of this “new trinitarianism” and after filtering out remnants he still finds in it of “the Sabellian modalism which the early church condemned,” spins out a Trinitarian mission theology that comes clearly in focus through the prism of law-promise lenses. It’s too big a piece for me to summarize beyond this. Should you want to know more, ask him about it. gsimpsonATluthersem.edu
5. When I first read Gary’s paper, I tweaked him for bypassing my German mentor, Werner Elert, as he traced the roots of the new trinitarianism. In the Summer Semester 1953, three of us Concordia Seminary alums were hearing Elert’s lectures in dogmatics at the University of Erlangen. Here are some of the “Feste Saetze” from my notes of 53 yrs ago (literally “solid sentences” that Elert would dictate to us summarizing what he’d just told us in the lecture). Here are a few of them interspersed with some extrapolations of my own.
 1. There are really only two “dogmas” in Christian theology, the Ttrinitarian dogma and the Christological dogma. [Perhaps “justification by faith alone” might be considered a dogma by the definition proposed below, but if the first two were appropriated aright, such a third wouldn’t be needed.]
 2. A “dogma” (according to what the early church meant by the term) is NOT what you’ve “gotta” believe in order to be a Christian, but what “has to be” at the center of Christian preaching in order to make that proclamation “Gospel.” Elert’s simple “fester Satz” was “Dogma ist das Sollgehalt des Kerygmas.”

3. Thus the variety of proposals debated in the early church for both the Trinitarian dogma and the Christological dogma are finally to be measured by the kerygma, by the NT proclamation.
4. The “correct” Trinitarian formulation is the one that best gives us language for talking about God as Gospel. Ditto for the “correct” Christological formula.
5. E.g., Sabellius’ Trinitarian formula might be stated thus: God is a unitary “X” (a “monon,,” a one-thing) behind all the “modes” of his showing himself to us as creator, redeemer and sustainer. But once you leave the “real God,” as the unknown still mysteriously behind all the modes, why can’t Zeus, the Buddha, Vishnu, or the Koran be equal “modes” of God’s connecting with us? And that “mysterious X” sounds like deus absconditus, whom to seek or contemplate has drastic consequences, according to NT proclamation.
6. Same is true of Arius’s early-4th-century proposal for Christology. Its defect is that its “good news quotient” is not “good enough” for what’s needed if “God was indeed in Christ reconciling sinners unto himself, making Christ (who knew no sin) to BE sin for us, so that we sinners might become—hang onto your hats!—the very righteousness of God!” The Good News in Arius’s Christology is too small. His Christ is too small.

[If for some Thursday this summer the ThTh well is running low, I’ll post some more of Elert’s “Feste Saetze,” especially the sequence that links the Trinitarian dogma with law/promise theology. That linkage was sharply challenged last month in Bob Jenson’s article in The Christian Century, May 2, p. 31-35.

Major “new trinitarian” that he is (with a lengthy section about it in this article) Jenson later on tells the CC readers that he is “appalled” by “those who use ‘justification by faith’—or in the especially aggravated case of Lutherans, the ‘law and gospel’ distinction—to fund their antinomianism.”

He may be talking about us, perhaps thinking of us as such villains. But then again, maybe not. That could be another item for ThTh summertime reflection. In his earlier teaching years at Gettysburg Luth. Seminary, Jenson (now 75ish) taught the Lutheran Confessions and with team-mate Eric Gritsch published the book on Law’Gospel confessionalism that is still a classic. We used it all the time in Seminex. But now for Jenson it’s a no-no. As Alice said: “Things get curiouiser and curiouiser.”]

6. Back to a bit of whimsy. My 2002 student Yossa Way, an Anglican priest from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, told us that much of his family is Muslim. And in that family is a teasing cousin (male) who constantly tweaks Yossa about his religion: “You worship three gods and have only one wife. We worship one God and may have three wives.” You can guess what his cousin thought was the better option.
7. Which segues to the standard big stumbling blocks for Muslims about the Christian faith: the Trinity and a crucified Jesus. From what I know, the barricade is fundamentally cerebral. How can one God also be a troika? It doesn’t compute. How could God let such a holy prophet as Jesus die? That doesn’t compute either. So in the Koran Allah’s monism is kept pure in distant monarchian solitude, and Allah’s fairness is kept inviolate with Jesus rescued from dying before he is finished. Seems to me that what’s needed is for Christians to articulate both

of these ancient dogmas (Trinity and Christology) as Good News—not only for Muslims, but for ourselves. Have not both dogmas been “taught and learned” by us Christians as the “true statements” about the deity and about the Christ? So it was in my remembered parochial school catechesis.

8. If both dogmas are actually “Sollgehalt des Kerygmas,” the wine in the wineskins of Good News proclamation, then they are to be presented as just that. Elert liked to call this the “paraclesis” of the Paraclete, the encouraging Good Word coming from the third person of the Trinity. The dogma of the Trinity and the Christological dogma are “paraclesis,” encouraging Good News. The Paraclete’s job-description, along with the substance of that “paraclesis,” was the topic in last Sunday’s Pentecost Gospel reading. Jesus speaking: “When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. . . . The Paraclete . . . will not speak on his own [but] will take what is mine and declare it to you.” This job-description for the third person of the Trinity lies behind Luther’s phrase “Christum-treiben.” The Holy Spirit is not hyping his own agenda of “spiritual” stuff. Instead he is the “Christ-hustler.” The Holy Gust blows Christ to people and vice versa.
9. It may appear as no big deal to get the Christological dogma hooked to the Good News, but how about the Trinitarian dogma—with all those diagrams we saw in Sunday School: triangles, three interlocking rings, etc. Yes, it’s hard to get Gospel out of such godly geometry. But God has messed up the geometry already. To wit, we need to remember that since the incarnation (beginning at Bethlehem, and now full-cycle to Ascension) there is now a human being in one of those triangle corners. There is one

of us—even more, a brother—in one of these three rings. That does mess up the symmetry of the geometry. But that is what it took, according to the Christian kerygma, to get Good News into God-talk.

10. Luther isn't the only one who proclaimed Trinity as Good News, but he did do it with a flair. For example, at the very end of his Large Catechism section on the Trinitarian Creed:

*“Here in the Creed you have the entire essence of God, his will, and his work exquisitely depicted in very short but rich words. In them consists all our wisdom, which surpasses all the wisdom, understanding, and reason of men. Although the whole world has sought painstakingly to learn what God is and what he thinks and does, yet it has never succeeded in the least. But here you have everything in richest measure. In these three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love. He created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself.”*As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit. [N.B., the “reverse” sequence (third article to second article to first article): Holy Spirit connects us to Christ, who connects us to the Father's favor and grace. Good News from one end to the other.]

“These articles of the Creed, therefore, divide and

distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside the Christian church, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God, nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing. Therefore they remain in eternal wrath and damnation, for they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit."

Note Luther's line of reasoning: "heathen, Turks [=the word for Muslims in his day], Jews, etc. believe in and worship" the only God there is, but they lack Trinitarian [=Good News] connection with this one, true God. Thus they "remain" in the "bad news" dilemma of all humankind who do not "have" Christ as Lord, but have some other Lord. It's not "believing" the right things about who is Lord, but "having" as "my Lord" (remember Thomas's confession) the one who is Lord over eternal wrath and damnation. The key is having the crucified and risen Christ as your own Lord. And with that Trinitarianism we're back to the Christology of the theology of the cross—the two ancient dogmas cheek by jowl, and all of it Good News. Definitely something to celebrate this coming Sunday.

Peace & joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. Here are two "interesting" web-references to past ThTh postings.

http://agonist.org/techadvisor/20060529/the_purpose_driven_life_takers

<http://www.asianchristianart.org/>

Earthquake in Yogyakarta

Colleagues,

Marie and I have dear friends in earthquake-devasted Yogyakarta, Java, friends from our earlier Mission Volunteer days in Indonesia. The folks we know there are with the ACAA, the Asian Christian Art Association—Judo Poerwowidagdo (ACAA president), his wife Timur, and Marthen Tahun, prime-mover for producing IMAGE, the association's quarterly journal. We've been members almost from the ACAA's founding 27 years ago, but we can no longer remember how that all came about. Marie continues to be in regular contact with ACAA office in "Yogya," as she edits the English language articles that accompany the art works pictured in each issue of IMAGE. In cyber-space it's a piece of cake. Marthen ships over to her the copy after he's finished with the layout. Marie brushes up the sometimes "interesting" English, posts it back to him, and before long an airmail hardcopy is in our St. Louis mailbox. The most recent issue was number #106. Except for 4 issues that we somehow somewhere lost, we have all the rest from #1 to 106. They constitute an astounding chronicle of Asian Christian Art. Works from a number of the ACAA members who are "real artists" are in our home. If you're ever in St. Louis, stop by and we'll show and tell.

But enough of that. Here is Marthen's e-mail from May 29.

Even in these days of tectonic terror—yes, especially in these days—Christ's Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Dear Friends, As you may have noticed that an earthquake in 5.9 RS (some scholar says 6.2 RS) was happened in Yogyakarta at the early morning of Saturday, May 27, 2006. It was big shock for us. The book shelves at the ACAA office was falling and the wall is cracking. However we are – Dr. Judo Poerwowidagdo, Dyah Merduwati, myself and our relatives are all right. The electricity and telephone networks was off but then reinstalled hours after that so we could inform relatives and friends outside the city who may have worried about us due to this tragedy. Thanks for all your support and prayer for us in Yogyakarta.

A great shaking only happened in a short time, but has created a great devastation in some places in Yogyakarta and the districts nearby. It took more than 5000 people's lives. Thousand and thousand more have lost their houses and their relatives as well. Hospitals in Yogyakarta are now full of wounded people while many more still at their villages waiting for the aid. A positive response to help the victims comes from many NGO, religion-affiliated organizations, groups of humanitarian workers and also from the people in town.

This tectonic earthquake with the epicentrum at the South Yogyakarta was unexpected tragedy, since all our attention were focused on the eruption of Merapi vulcano at the North of Yogyakarta. The aid priorities and perhaps people's attention now shift from those at the refugee camps close to the Merapi volcano to the devastation areas caused by the earthquake at the South and the East of Yogyakarta. Now people are not as panic as the first two days, however the rumor about the sequel earthquake, the uncertainty and unpredictable greater eruption of the Merapi volcano still in the concern of many people.

This tragedy comes when we are at the mid of the ascencion and

pentecostal celebration. It is yet a challenge for Christian, to find the image of God and His presence in the midst of those who suffer – the God that live in solidarity with those who may have lost their hope to sustain their life, the God that extends his love through us in order to show his mercy for others who are in need.

*Good Wishes,
Marthen Tahun
ACAA Staff*

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[PS from ES. Although Marthen doesn't mention it, the ACAA needs help. Should this be your concern, say so and we'll connect you with New Zealander Ron O'Grady, the ACAA person you should talk to.]

PS #2 Here is the text we sent in for the 25th anniversary issue of IMAGE, #100. September 2004:

IMAGE –this word is a weighty Biblical term, both in the Old and the New Testaments. It is not so easy to render in modern languages. In Scripture's creation story humans are created "in God's image." Our favorite interpretation of this is that we are made to "mirror" God, to be "God-reflectors" to the whole world. But sadly, in this broken world, it is no longer true of us. We are fractured reflectors. Only Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, reflects God's image perfectly – and wonder of wonders, he restores us broken mirrors to be God-reflectors as well. As St. Paul says, we are "reformed into Christ's own image."

Christian artists, as restored images, mirror God especially in

his mercy to the world again. Now for 100 issues our own IMAGE magazine has sought to show us the work of their hands in the Asian context. Images of Christ, images of our broken world, and images of that world restored, speak to us through these pages. We thank God for the faithful work of both artists and editors, and hope for a lively continuation of the project as the Lord gives life and vision. [p.3, IMAGE 100]

The Ascension of our Lord

Colleagues, Today is probably the most uncelebrated “Feast of our Lord” in the whole church year—at least among Christians in the USA. Lutherans included. Signal of its insignificance may be the glitch in the Thrivent “Lutheran Pastor’s Desk Diary–2006” that puts Ascension—mirabile dictu!—on Friday this year! Not so. It’s always a Thursday—40 days after Easter and 10 days before Pentecost. It’s always Thursday theology.

But it does get attention in the “old country.” Even secularized Germany. For folks there Ascension is a national holiday. Today, May 25, is a day off. We learned that 50 years ago when we were grad students in Germany. Granted, though worship was happening in the churches, most folks were elsewhere. Especially the guys. It was tradition for “Männer” to be off somewhere (preferably outdoors) for a stag event, getting “high” themselves on stuff unlinked to Christ’s own elevation.

But Ascension was a bigger deal here at home when I was a kid. We always went to church. I’ve just compared the two Lutheran hymnals that bracket my life. My “old” LCMS hymnal from those

days has 12 Ascension hymns in it. Guess what the ELCA's Lutheran Book of Worship has? Four.

So just what is the "Thursday Theology" of the Ascension of our Lord? I could get to that merely by printing out the text of some of those hymns for the day, many of which I memorized in Immanuel Lutheran parochial school. The first one that comes to mind is "On Christ's Ascension I now build the hope of mine ascension." If Christian hope is "built" on Christ's ascension, it must be important. Or was hymnwriter Josua Wegelin (1636) exaggerating?

Well then, how about Venerable Bede—a whole millennium earlier in the seventh century? [By the way, Bede is the only Englishman whom Dante names in the Paradiso of his Divine Comedy.]

*A hymn of glory let us sing;
New songs throughout the world shall ring:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Christ by a road before untrod,
Ascendeth to the throne of God.
Alleluia! (5x)*

Bede's major metaphor in the verse is that "road before untrod." That "road" is the "Thursday theology" of Ascension. And to get more help on that, you have to go to the Gospel of John, which Bede was translating on the day he died. Mark says nothing about ascension. Neither does Matthew. Luke makes it the literary linch-pin between his two volumes of Luke-Acts, telling of it as his last paragraph in volume one and the first episode reported in volume two. But it is John who theologizes about ascension—and about that "road before untrod," namely, the "way of the cross."

So what does John do? First off, he messes up the calendar.

There's no 40-day interlude twixt Easter and Ascension for John, nor any 10 more days to Pentecost. No, it all happens on one day. Easter, Ascension, Pentecost are the same day, the "day that sees him rise"—first from the tomb and then back to the Father. Then before sunset he's back again with his terrified disciples to "breathe" onto them the Holy Spirit. See for yourself. They are all compressed in John's Easter Sunday story, chapter 20. So when Thomas shows up seven days later, it's already a week after Ascension, a week after Pentecost. Thomas is the first post-Pentecost Christian.

The "road before untrod" is signalled in the death-marks of Jesus' hands, feet, side. They are not an embarrassment to his Lordship, but the trademarks thereof. Upside-down lordship carries topsy-turvy trademarks.

But back to the ascension in John 20. It comes—in just one verse (17)—in the recognition encounter between Jesus and Mary Magdalene (pace Dan Brown!) at the open tomb. Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

What's all in that one verse? Bob Bertram of blessed memory liked to exegete it this way: For John, Jesus's job is to get the renegade, even bastard, children of God back to the Father. Get them to be "born of God" again as indicated in John's prolog (chapter 1) and the Nicodemus dialogue (chap.3). So although the job is done as the sun lowers on Good Friday (in Greek it's but one word: Tetelestai — "It is finished" or "case closed"), the completion of this completion is to get the "kids" themselves back home to Abba.

So as the second-last lap of Easter Jesus makes a trip back home. But not returning empty-handed. He's got all the rescued

kids along with him. These are the ones who “received him, who believed in his name,” who now have the “right to be called children of God.” (1:12) So he takes his new siblings along with him back home. “Look, Dad. Look who—who all—I’ve brought along with me.”

Then comes the final-lap of Jesus’ Easter, according to John. Jesus himself comes back to the locked rooms where weak-faithed and frightened disciples are gathered (and who of us isn’t in their midst?) and “pentecosts” them with the power-pack they’ll need for the long haul. John’s label for this second-wind-supplier is “the paraclete.” And with the triad complete—Easter, Ascension, Pentecost—Jesus sends them, sends us, on our way: “As the Father has sent me, so send I you.”

For John it’s all one ball of wax. Jesus brings us “bad kids” back home to Papa by this way before untrod. He went into the treadmill, and came out the other side carrying us along right back to the Father where he himself started. And is John not telling us that upon his return from this home-visit late Easter Day, he had “Papa’s” approval to literally put Papa’s own Spirit—wind, breath, “juice”—into the former renegade, but now rehabilitated, kids? What else can it mean that THREE times in this pericope he says “Peace be with you”? No more enmity between kids and Papa. And all “finished” by virtue of his taking that “way before untrod.”

Christ’s ascension is not a synonym for his “real absence,” but the exact opposite. Call it “paracletic presence,” the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is the stuff that Luther proclaimed when unpacking the third article of the Apostles Creed. “I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or connect to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the [preached] Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just

as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

And what is the paraclete’s fundamental transaction? Making sure that the Christ-connected never sin again? Not at all. Fearful believers—yes, sinful believers— are kept “in union with Christ” by the forgiveness of sins. Not just once, but over and over again. “In this Christian church the paraclete daily and abundantly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers.” For how long? “Until the last day [when] he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.”

Listen to Ascension’s Thursday theology in William C. Dix’s hymn:

*Alleluia! Sing to Jesus;
His the scepter, his the throne;
Alleluia! His the triumph,
His the victory alone.
Hark! The songs of peaceful Zion
Thunder like a mighty flood:
“Jesus out of every nation
Has redeemed us by his blood.”
Alleluia! Not as orphans
Are we left in sorrow now;
Alleluia! He is near us;
Faith believes, nor questions how,
Though the cloud from sight received him
When the forty days were o’er,
Shall our hearts forget his promise:
“I am with you evermore”?

Alleluia! Bread of heaven,*

*Here on earth our food, our stay;
Alleluia! Here the sinful
Flee to you from day to day.
Intercessor, friend of sinners,
Earth's redeemer, hear our plea
Where the songs of all the sinless
Sweep across the crystal sea.*

*Alleluia! King eternal,
Lord omnipotent we own;
Alleluia! Born of Mary,
Earth your footstool, heav'n your throne.
As within the veil you entered,
Robed in flesh, our great high priest,
Here on earth both priest and victim
In the eucharistic feast.
[LBW 158]*

That's Ascension's good news. A Feast of our Lord worth celebrating. Thursday theology indeed!

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder.

Theologian Giants out of

Missouri

Colleagues, With the death of Jaroslav J. Pelikan [b. 17 Dec. 1923] on May 13, 2006 one of the super-nova theologians who grew up in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod has arrived at rest in peace. The Pelikan family were Slovaks, JJP's father also a pastor in the "Slovak district" of the LCMS, into whose ministry JJP was also ordained upon graduation from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. But he was larger than life already in his early years, and stories (legends? myths?) still circulate in Missouri of his antics and superstar achievements beginning at prep-school in Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

One such work of super-erogation shortly after seminary graduation (and getting his Ph.D. "in the same year," so it is said) was tackling Luther. Prime-mover for, and co-editor of, the monumental 55-volume edition of Luther's Works in English, Pelikan was "the" Luther scholar of America during his early years as teaching theologian. That also received global attention as he was chosen to be president (even with all those Germans there!) of the "International Luther Research Congress" in the 1970s.

In his middle years he literally moved "out" of Missouri, but kept Lutheran connections while teaching "out in the world," initially at the University of Chicago and then many decades at Yale—publishing "big" theological works year after year, that are now classics. I just googled his name on the www and got 297,000 hits.

In 1998 he moved out of Lutheranism into Russian orthodoxy, no longer resisting the slavophile double-helices that were in his genes. When his life-long buddy (from prep-school days onward), Bob Bertram, asked him about this move, he responded: "Bob, it was finally time, I thought, to become de jure what for years I

was de facto.”

[For me he was a triple blessing, my teacher at three different schools. And when our daughter went to Yale he was her teacher too.]

An obit for Jaroslav Jan Pelikan was in the May 16 New York Times, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/16/obituaries/16PELIKAN.html> Perhaps it's still there for you to read when this ThTh post gets to you.

The St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary announcement was concise, clear and crisp: “Dr Jaroslav Pelikan falls asleep in the Lord. Christ is Risen!”

2. Another superstar “out of Missouri” is Martin E. Marty. Like Pelikan, MEM is also an historian. [I remember JJP telling us in a 1950 seminary class that he chose church history rather than systematic theology as his bailiwick, “because in the LCMS you don't get into trouble for merely reporting on what OTHER people taught.” Did MEM do likewise? Why didn't I learn that lesson?] Marty's interests and publications too go across the spectrum. I got “only” 225K Google-hits for his name. Just for fun go to the following web address and “click around” on MEM. www.illumino.com Don't miss the link to “doctorates.”
3. Another “out of Missouri” giant is Frederick Danker, about whom I circulated a notice last week concerning his honorary doctorate from the Dominican “Aquinas Institute” here in St. Louis. Greetings for Fred came my way from 50 of you which I've handed over to him. The one from Marty points to Fred as one in 6 billion: Dear Ed: Do carry my greetings to Fred. That tribute [“world's #1 N.T. lexicographer”] you pay to him (who of us can hear with so

little challenge that we are “the world’s best” at something, as he certainly is) is much in place—as is that of the Aquinas people. I can’t even picture picturing the careful work that has to go into something like that. [sc. Fred’s 1100-page lexicon to the Greek New Testament] How many ELCA folk are “best in the world,” other than that we all are, on the *iustus* side of the *simul* formula.

4. Another one is Norman Habel. Really an Aussie Lutheran, professor of Old Testament—and umpteen other things, Norm lived and worked some 20 years “in Missouri.” His latest venture is a “Season of Creation” to be tucked into the Church Year around the time of the Day of St. Francis of Assisi October 4. Want to know more? Check this website www.seasonofcreation.com Besides making the case for such an addendum to the liturgical calendar (already in use in Australia) Norm offers a panoply of goodies for doing so everywhere.
5. A much younger shining star, also “out of Missouri,” is Kathryn Kleinhans, theology professor at Wartburg (Lutheran) College, Waverly, Iowa. Evidence of where she is coming from and where she is heading is also on the internet this week.

I’m proposing her essay as the theology posting for today’s ThTh #414. Rather than reprinting it, I’ll tell you where to find it in cyberspace. It’s KK’s article for the June issue of THE LUTHERAN, monthly magazine of the ELCA. She has the cover story “Lutheranism 101.” It’s previewed on the magazine’s website.

Here’s the address: http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=5895&key=34751023

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

ELCA Launches Project on How to Read the Bible

Colleagues,

Pastor Robin Morgan supplies this week's ThTh posting, some reflections on "literalist" Bible-reading in connection with the ELCA's current project to find a better way to "read and understand the Bible." Apparently such literalist Bible reading still afflicts the membership of the "liberal" ELCA. I know that's true. But it may surprise some folks, especially those at the supposed other end of the spectrum in the LCMS. For "Biblical literalism" was what the fight was all about in the 1970s in the LCMS. [That's obviously a partisan opinion. Even more partisan is my saying it was "literalism vs. Lutheranism.."] That conflict put yours truly and 44 of my colleagues at Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) out on the street with the verdict "cannot to be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended." Hence Seminex; hence Crossings; hence this website's constant one-string-banjo about law-gospel hermeneutics as the distinct Lutheran proposal for how to read the Bible. Will that banjo's tune get into the ELCA's project—even as a minority opinion? If the handful of Seminex-alum-bishops in the ELCA would hustle for it, it might have a chance.

And law-gospel Bible-reading is still challenged in the LCMS. Listen to this recent PR about a summer offering from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis:

“Two Kinds of Righteousness: A Better Paradigm than Law and Gospel. This workshop will explore the liabilities of overextending the application of the Law-Gospel dynamic and allowing it to become a polarity, which inevitably swallows any ability to speak positively about the Law. The ultimate damage done to parishes and individual Christians as they succumb to antinomianism and/or legalism will be explored and discussed. It will be suggested that the two kinds of righteousness provide a much better and more Lutheran way of approaching the theological task in a home and parish setting.”

We survivors of the Wars of Missouri know where that workshop is going. Can you hear the father of Missouri, C.F.W. Walther, also the founder of Concordia Seminary, who established “law-gospel” as the trademark of Missouri’s Lutheranism—can you hear him turning over in his grave? And if this course description should ever get back to Wittenberg, blessed Martin would twitch too in his tomb before the pulpit of the Castle Church. “Better and more Lutheran” than the Meister himself! That’s chutzpah!

Just for the record, Law-Gospel hermeneutics says:

1. The Bible is “medical” literature, the hospital “charts” of afflicted patients, with The Doctor’s diagnosis and then the Same Doctor’s therapy offered.
2. Its law messages diagnose human sickness.
3. Its Gospel message offers the therapeutic healing ultimately centered in the crucified and risen Christ.
4. Proceed as follows: probe the law’s diagnosis in any Bible text deep enough to see how it “necessitates” this Christ to heal the patient.
5. Probe again how the text applies its Christic therapy to the patient.
6. Repeat 4 & 5 with yourself and your audience as the patients.

Enough of that. Here's Robin.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Ed decided I didn't have enough work to do right now and so handed on to me "The Authority of Scripture," a paper by Craig Nesson, academic dean and professor of contextual theology at Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, that was presented to the Conference of Bishops in March. This paper was presented in conjunction with the ELCA push to develop resources to help our increasingly biblically-illiterate church folk learn to read the Bible. Ed had discovered the reference to this paper in the April 2006 issue of "The Lutheran" in an article by Daniel J. Lehmann entitled "Work launched on guide to reading, understanding the Bible." So, here I am reading Nesson's paper and, in the process, having flashbacks from my college days in the 70s when I was a literalist Bible believer – the focus of Nesson's argument. He obviously sees the ELCA's role as one of dialogue partner with the literalists. This paper is a step toward offering some starting points in such a conversation for those of us who espouse that the word of God is inspired rather than inerrant.

Nesson outlines five points that he will address in this paper: 1) the meaning of 'inspiration', 2) the importance of attending to the 'literal sense', 3) the 'surplus' of biblical texts, 4) the functioning of 'canon within the canon' in the interpretive process, and 5) the role of the Christian community in deliberating the authority of the Bible for faith and life. Nesson looks at all of these points through the lens of 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "16All scripture is given by inspiration of

God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

I purposely quote it in the King James because 2 Tim 3:16-17 in the KJV is THE text of literalists, although the NIV is O.K. now, too. But back in the 70s, KJV was the only version to use. It was easier to memorize since it is more poetic and the language just odd enough to catch in your head. The KJV also needs to be explained more thoroughly so that naïve seekers like me could be more completely inculcated with the doctrines being promulgated.

But I digress.

Nessan's basic point is that "when it comes to establishing the authority of Scripture, our primary resource is the communal experience of God's people over time." He quotes Luther from "How Christians Should Regard Moses" as saying "One must deal cleanly with the Scriptures. From the very beginning the word has come to us in various ways. It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God's word, whether God has said it; rather we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. That makes all the difference between night and day."

Nessan quotes a lot of big names: Bultmann, Ricoeur, Gadamer, Calvin, Tracy, even George Marsden from the evangelical side. It's a wonderful review of basic biblical hermeneutics that we all learned in seminary. Go ahead and download it, it's definitely worth reading from that perspective.

<http://www.thelutheran.org/doc/extras/nessan.pdf>

But I'm not going to analyze it point-by-point here because it doesn't really address the mindset that drives people to the

literalist camp. I keep thinking of a 20-year-old kid on a big college campus who is terrified out of her mind about how to be out here in the world and what such a paper would have meant to her. Just one more way the institutional church has no clue what's going on.

My boyfriend and I went to a Lutheran campus church (one of the ELCA predecessor churches) and got ignored. I even went to a Lutheran campus event with one of my friends, but since I wasn't part of the "already-Lutheran in-crowd" I didn't know the lingo. I talked to my English teacher about her Catholic faith and she said she didn't think I was mature enough yet for grace. We got involved with Transcendental Meditation for awhile, but that "cosmic custard" approach to spirituality didn't really do it for me.

One evening when I was washing walls in the lab of the hospital where I was a part-time janitor, my co-worker started witnessing to me. He was also a student at the university I was attending. Previously, he'd spent his first year out of high school at the US Air Force Academy. Then he'd come home and spent the next two years smoking dope, dropping acid and picking up trash with the city crews. Not until he got involved with the literalist Bible believers did his life start to turn around.

I'd always wanted to know the Bible. I'd grown up in a mainline denomination (not Lutheran) and so knew little of Scripture other than the basic mainline moral imperative to "be nice." I started going to the small group meetings my co-worker attended and then signed up for the three-week class that laid the biblical groundwork for this literalist perspective.

This wasn't just about Bible knowledge, however. I got community in the small groups, Biblical knowledge that was

absolutely true (or so they told us) and one other thing – spiritual experience. This was also a charismatic group and at the end of the three-week class, most everyone began speaking in tongues. It was a heady combination for a fearful 20-year-old trying to find her way in the world – certainty about truth, community and a personal spiritual connection with God.

I spent 10 years with this group. It had an international network that was headquartered in Ohio where many of us went for further training and fellowship events. That was still the time of Woodstock nation and so each summer we gathered for a Woodstock-like week of camping, music, learning and general good, wholesome Christian fun.

At least those of us outside the inner circle gathered for that. As it turned out, the leadership was gathering with other intentions in mind. Orgies, wife-swapping and all manner of extra-marital sexual activity well lubricated by generous amounts of alcohol had become normal leadership fare. In the wake of the exposure of these activities and the ensuing power struggles, I left.

I desperately wanted to become an atheist. Thousands of dollars in therapy bills and life-rebuilding time later, I couldn't quite make it to Madalyn Murray O'Hair's side of the street. I could still speak in tongues, which irritated me no end. I finally gave in and decided there was, indeed, a God.. Then we moved to St. Louis.

For some reason, my husband looked up the nearest Lutheran church in the yellow pages and we went one Sunday. I didn't really want to, but the kids needed some spiritual training. A couple weeks later when I was off with a friend from out-of-town, Ed showed up at our church to do adult forum and my husband brought home brochures about Crossings. I still wanted

to learn and since I was new in town, I called what I thought was the Crossings' office hoping to get a catalog of their classes. Instead I got Ed answering the phone in his kitchen. The rest is history.

Ed introduced me to Jesus. That's what Lutherans have that other people want. A relationship of trust with God's messiah. Keep your lutefisk and your brats. Keep your green book and your pristine pipe organs. The depth of a relationship with Jesus is what exposes and heals the core fears and need-to-control at the root of the literalist frenzy. Everything else comes later.

I learned that God held me accountable for my own life. That was an amazing aha for me. My life is my responsibility, I couldn't hand my life to some leader and think I was doing God's will. But even in the midst of the mess I'd made of my life was this incredible grace (that I didn't have to be mature at all to be given) through Jesus who lived and died and was raised FOR ME! Maybe this is just words for some of you who've been droning through worship in the red book or blue book or green book since you could read, but that really is GOOD and NEW for those of us who didn't grow up with it. The legalistic bind the literalists eventually get themselves tangled up in is so far from real grace that I completely understand why they have so little mercy available for anyone else.

The community will come. The biblical hermeneutics will come. However, I couldn't allow the literalist theological structure in my head to be completely dismantled until I trusted Christ enough to know that no matter what happened and what seminary professors told me about the Bible, Jesus was going to be right at my side through it all. Then I could let go of the literalist interpretations. He will never leave me nor forsake me.

My advice to the ELCA is don't mess with the literalists unless you're willing to make a long-term commitment to working one-on-one with these people. I know, and Ed will concur, that I have been a high-maintenance, long-term pastoral project in his life. I have had infinite questions and challenge what he says every step of the way. My life in the ELCA has been somewhat of a roller coaster, even as a leader, because I refuse to get side-tracked by what I consider to be penultimate tasks when we aren't accomplishing the ultimate task we've been given to do.

Putting together resources to help people learn and understand the Bible is a good idea. Just make sure we keep the First One first.

Robin J. Morgan

In the Afterglow of Easter 2006

Colleagues:

ForewordAlthough the ThTh number above is “only” 412, there came 88 Sabbath Theology postings beforehand from the computer on this desk. Add them up and it's 500. Five hundred postings choreographed around law-promise theology. As Luther might ask: What does this 500 mean? It's you readers who can best answer that question, of course. But you're not at this computer keyboard right now.

Every now and then some of you do bounce back with an answer to

that question, more often than not affirmative and encouraging. However there are also some unhappy campers who tell me otherwise.

Number ONE of these 500 was the Crossings Community's first venture into "internet theology." We (better I) didn't really know what we were doing. We didn't try to replicate in cyberspace the two programs we had evolved. One of those was weekend workshops (250 of them) in congregations around the country and overseas from 1974 to 1994. Here the focus was on "crossing" the daily work of participants with the Sunday lectionary texts. We couldn't figure out how to do that in cyberspace.

The second program was semester-long seminars with syllabus, readings, written papers and lots of discussion. A curriculum of 20 such seminars evolved. How to do that in cyberspace was also beyond us.

So our venture into cyberspace took one element present in both of these programs and tried it on the internet. It was Crossings-style analysis of Biblical texts offered, so we thought, mostly to help Sunday morning preachers. After 88 of these from my hand, next-generation Crossings folks took over and have been doing well ever since. A short while after passing the baton I was bit by the internet-bug again and Thursday Theology postings began—411 Thursdays ago. So today is number 500.

The "Indy 500" automobile race is a big event coming up this month in our land. Prompts me to reflect on the finish line that these 500 postings—"the Windy(?) 500"—crosses today. Finish line? Probably not. But 500 more from yours truly is very improbable indeed. Nevertheless, one of these Thursdays

But for now the 500th posting, two items that found their way

into my Easter basket this year.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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1. From the Valparaiso University Chapel, Easter Sunday 2006[Walter Wangerin, known to many listserve receivers, was the preacher at the chapel of Valparaiso University for the Easter Sunday liturgy this year. Walt is currently undergoing "very aggressive treatments for inoperable metastasized lung cancer." Fred Niedner, VU's theology department chair, sent me this.]

You asked about Walt's preaching at our Easter service. He preached a 45-minute masterpiece on Sunday. It was proclamation plus a lesson on how to read Mark's Gospel [=this year's lectionary text for Easter]. He said that we read Mark three times, or in three ways, in our lives as disciples. We read it naively as children, and when we get to the end, we swing around the Son the way NASA sling-shots satellites around the Sun, and head back into our lives, whereupon we read the story again a bit less naively and then, as Gordon Lathrop asserts, we see the risen Christ all through it (he's gone ahead of us to Galilee, right?). Then we sling-shot around the Son again at the end, and this time we read it as our own cross-bound story with a tomb at the end.

Into all this Walt wove the story of a time a group of children showed up early for an Evansville Easter service when he was doing his nervous, pre-service pacing. He decided to tell the children the story of Jesus, including

the crucifixion. He left the part about the empty tomb for the sermon in the service, however. One little girl named Lorena had been so sad at the crucifixion part of the pre-service story, but after the service and sermon, she was happy again and came to stand by Walt as he shook hands afterwards. And Walt somehow ended up being the person who drove her home. She got out of his car and skipped up the walk and into her home.

Then he stopped and said, "I am Lorena. I've read and lived this story three times, at least, and I'm going home. I'm not afraid. I am ready to go."

It was mighty quiet in the Chapel at that point, and no one seemed to mind that the service, which began at 10:30 a.m., ended at 1 p.m. Sadly, however, the Chapel's new system of recording all sermons so as to "pod-cast" them on the Chapel web site failed to function normally and there is no recording of Walt's sermon. That one would be precious to have.

2. A note from Dean Lueking on May 1 about his brother-in-law, Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, whose life is moving toward closure. [Pelikan was my teacher at three different schools—Valparaiso University and two Lutheran seminaries. During my undergrad years at VU he figured prominently (along with Dick Luecke and Bob Bertram) in bending me away from my pre-med program toward theology. I've never been the same since.] I talked with Jary's son, Martin, this evening and the report is that Jary is given several weeks at most before he dies. As some may not know, he was diagnosed with lung cancer about 15 months ago and has been fighting the good fight since. He is as comfortable as possible. Hospice folks have come in. Both sons are remaining with Sylvia and Jary till death comes. He is

mostly quiet, though not comatose; it is a chore for him to engage in conversation. As his son quoted him saying recently: "...since Christ is risen, nothing else matters and if Christ be not risen nothing else matters." JP is JP right down to the goal line. We will let you know when we are informed about more. Meanwhile, what better can we do for our exceptional teacher, mentor, brother and friend than to keep him and his dear ones in prayer – and know with him that though under the law we are surrounded in life by death, yet under the Gospel we are in death surrounded by Life!

Dean

I've Got my Doubts about "Praising Doubt"

Colleagues, Not till this past Sunday afternoon did I get around to reading the March 2006 issue of THE LUTHERAN, the monthly journal of "my" church, the ELCA. The cover page hyped the 4 lead articles: "In Praise of Doubt . . . Plus Study Guide." Because it was "last Sunday afternoon," the Sunday after Easter, I'd just heard the so-called "Doubting Thomas" text of John 20 a few hours earlier at our liturgy and listened to my pastor preach on the text.

Laying the magazine texts side by side with John 20, there was scant correlation. It was dinky doubt vs. deadly doubt. "Can some of those Bible facts be true, e.g., virgin birth?" vs. "Is the Death-Marked Easter Jesus 'My Lord and my God,' or is Death

itself still my Lord and my God?"

The magazine authors (and the study-guide writer too) sought to speak to "this age-old affliction," but seems to me that all five diagnosticians were just scratching the surface, and all scratching in the same (wrong) place. Biggest signal thereof is the bandaids remedies they proposed to heal the affliction. In the lead article it wasn't even an affliction. "In Praise of Doubt" told us the benefits of doubt: "Keeps us creatively engaged with God, in tension with God," we were told several times. Can you imagine Jesus telling that to Thomas?

So it comes as no surprise—sadly—that in this lead article Christ never gets mentioned once (sic!)—for any benefit at all. So could not a faithful Jew—or Muslim—have written the piece? I think so. If doubt is finally "only" a headache, then aspirin will work. But if it's cancer, then ask Thomas what he'd have done, had Jesus told him (as the lead article concludes): "It's OK to doubt. You're not alone in your struggles. The fact that you are still able to serve God, to do some good, to proclaim some truth and to love one another despite your doubts testifies to the fact that God must really be with you."

Had Jesus urged Thomas to trust such a gospel-within-yourself, Thomas would surely have replied: "Well then, one thing is clear: you are NOT my Lord and my God."

So I've got my doubts about "Praising Doubt"

We are given the Lutheran credentials for all five of these authors. Luther gets quoted for support too with references to his frequent mention of "Anfechtung" [see below]. Yet the five are not talking about "Lutheran" doubt either. Because they are not talking about the deep doubt, the "focused" doubt, that John's Gospel shows us in Thomas. It is Thomas' brand of doubt that is at the heart of Luther's word "Anfechtung."

Some thoughts.

1. Thomas' doubt is Christo-centric. That may sound strange, but hang on. Christ is the focus of what's "not believed." It's not doctrines or even alleged "facts" that are disbelieved. What Thomas does NOT believe is NOT that corpses come back from the dead. Given the culture he grew up in, he probably did believe that. What he won't/can't believe (as we learn when he finally DOES believe and put it into words) is that a crucified Messiah could be "my Lord and my God," or anybody else's either. "Can this death-marked Jesus, even alive after his own death, can he trump MY death. No way."
2. For Luther it's the same. *Anfechtung* is not about "mini-doubts"—virgin birth, Biblical accuracy, impossible facts, even resuscitated corpses. *Anfechtung* goes for the jugular, for what you "hang your heart on," as Luther liked to say. The German word is attack language. "*Fechten*" is a sword fight. *Anfechtung* is someone pulling a sword on you. *Anfechtung* attacks the promise. Faith and Promise constitute the primal Lutheran corollary. Faith (=trust) is always "faith in God's promise." Central to that promise is Christ crucified and risen with his promissory word "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven." Or in the promise-language of John 20, with nail-scarred hands he offers the disciples (3 times!) "Peace with God." No more bilateral enmity on my interface with God.
3. By contrast, the lead article never once mentions the word Jesus or Christ. The Title, "In praise of doubt," is praising something else than what afflicts Thomas. Thomas' *Anfechtung* gets no praise in John 20. It's an affliction. An attack. He's at the precipice. It's primal doubt. Is death finally my "Lord and God?" Is death or this

crucified Messiah the one who finally owns me and has the last word? Thomas' Anfechtung is also the Anfechtung of all the other disciples in the text. Behind locked doors for fear of the Judeans, what are their hearts hanging on? Granted, not hanging on in trust, but in terror—imploded trust—but hanging on none the less? What else but the conviction that before long the locked doors will not hold, and death will also have its last word with them?

4. This may sound harsh, but it's true. Doubt that is not Christo-centric, promise-centric, is not "Christian" doubt. It's emaciated doubt. Dinky doubt. The doubt from the age of enlightenment. Doubt about scientifically unverified truths—generic doubt—is in the last analysis "trivial" doubt. That's not Thomas's problem. He's on a different planet. Thomas's Anfechtung is about the trustworthiness of Jesus as God's promise-keeper and God's continuing promise-maker. That confronts us too today, every day. That's not trivial, that's the doubt that took Good Friday and Easter to remedy. For Luther that's the doubt that "attacked" Jesus himself on Good Friday in his "My God, my God, why...?" And all of that, for us and for our salvation.
5. I suspect that there is a parallel here to Luther's famous "sin boldly" advice to his colleague Melanchthon. Luther was in protective custody at the Wartburg castle in 1522. Melanchthon was "in charge" back in turbulent Wittenberg, but continually fretful lest he possibly do this or that wrong. In letters he told all this to Luther. "Stop fretting about these possible sins. They are all trivial," Luther told him. "If you want to be worried about sin, then do some big ones and do them 'fortiter' (robustly). Then trust and hope in Christ who is even bigger than your big sins." Enlightenment doubt about facts is piddly. Anfechtung, Thomas' doubt, is big stuff. It's "person"

doubt on the God-and-me interface.

6. Is the one I confess as “my Lord and my God” trustworthy or not? That’s the “to be or not to be” issue of real doubt. Given the wall-to-wall evidence to the contrary that surfeits the media, given the contrary evidence in our own personal lives (both inside and outside), is God for us or against us? That is THE question. John’s Jesus claims that trusting him renders us “beloved” to his Father. Just as beloved as Jesus himself is to that Father. It’s promise-language. All the disciples in John 20 are “Thomasic.” So are we. Is death “my” Lord and God or is it the scarred and now risen Jesus? Even if we grant “factually” that Jesus is alive, why should that benefit us? Hooray for Jesus! But those enemies are still right outside my locked doors and “fechten” is what they are shouting through the keyhole. How does Jesus’ conquest of death become my conquest?
7. The Thomas text is John’s answer in his Gospel. Jesus offers the scars for Thomas to touch. To touch is to transfer. “My death-scars are for you. My being alive after that death-match is also for you. Touch and take. Be not distrusting (non-taking) but be trusting (taking). Trust the offer and you have what is offered. Another old Luther phrase comes to mind: “Glaubstu, hastu” – You trust it, you have it. [By the way, the term “doubt” actually never appears in the John 20 text. It’s always “pistos” (trusting) or “apistos” (not trusting). Thomas’s confession of unfaith is not “I doubt it,” but “I will not believe.” Greek: “ou me (double negative!) pisteusoo.” “No way will I trust!”]
8. I wonder whether the sequence of two Sundays in a row within this John 20 text—“Easter Sunday evening . . . one week later”—points to something John intended. Namely, to John’s own original audience of worshipping Christians and

now us. Sunday after Sunday, Jesus arrives in our midst after another week of our *Anfechtung*, and over and over again does the same thing. "Here, have peace with God. The scars are the trademarks whereby I 'finished' it. No more enmity on the divine-human interface. Here, it's for you. Touch, take the transfer, trust. And as the Father sent me, so I send you out beyond your locked doors. See you next Sunday. I'll be here."

9. For Luther the super *Anfechtung* episode in the Bible for a believer was God calling Abraham to kill Isaac. The same God makes the promise and then says: Kill the promised boy. Really "patriarchal" is that *Anfechtung*, said Luther. None of us common believers could ever have survived it. But Abraham sets the pattern for us too. Trust the promise, even when the Promisor is now attacking you, yes, even attacking your hanging on to his promise. The conclusion of the Abraham story is itself Good News for promise-trusters when our *Anfechtungen* come.
10. Finally. One of the 5 writers in *THE LUTHERAN* does indeed talk about genuine *Anfechtung*—her own—big stuff, horrendous stuff, that "shredded my confidence in God." She tells us that after 5 years in the wilderness, she came to faith's oasis. Sadly however, in her entire story, Christ never gets mentioned either. And worst of all is the "schlock" Gospel she was given by a friend and former pastor: "I have so many doubts," he said. "So many questions, but I think God is big enough to understand. If he doesn't, he isn't a very secure God, is he?" How she found Gospel in that causes me to doubt. Can you imagine Jesus offering Thomas pabulum like that?
11. If Christ isn't necessary to "fix" a doubter's dilemma, the malady, though surely vexing, is trivial. Real doubt wrestles with who really is "my Lord and my God." Whose am I?—that's the "Lord" question. Whom can I trust?—that's

the “God” question. The Christian answer for both comes at Easter. His name is Jesus.

Who is why there is . . .

Easter Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

St. Louis, Missouri

“Lutheran Theology and Global Capitalism” [Or “Empire-building and Me”]

Colleagues,

Pastor Robin Morgan, occasional co-conspirator in these postings, links in this book review the grisly underside of today’s global capitalism with the results of her just-completed doctoral dissertation. In that dissertation she takes case studies of Lutheran ministry here in St. Louis and “crosses” them with Luther’s axiom of God’s ambidextrous work in the world. Although she doesn’t literally say so to make her case, she could have: “He’s got the whole world in his hands—BOTH of them.” As you may remember from her earlier postings, “care” and “redemption” are her labels for the work of God’s left and right hands, respectively. Applying that axiom to local Lutheran church history may seem reasonable enough. But how can she possibly connect that with the yucky global megalith that Perkins exposes in his “confessions?” Read on. Peace & Joy!

**John Perkins. Confessions of an Economic Hit Man.
(New York: Plume Books, 2006)**

303 pp, paperback. Price: US\$15.00

This book by John Perkins is a helpful, if painful, explanation of how our country, the USA, has gotten to this place in our history. He answers the question on so many people's minds right after 9/11, "Why do they hate us?" He offers an insider's overview of U.S. foreign policy since World War II.

Perkins opens his book with his definition of economic hit men:

"Economic hit men (EHMs) are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars. They funnel money from the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other foreign "aid" organizations into the coffers of huge corporations and the pockets of a few wealthy families who control the planet's natural resources. Their tools include fraudulent financial reports, rigged elections, payoffs, extortion, sex, and murder. They play a game as old as empire, but one that has taken on new and terrifying dimensions during this time of globalization. I should know; I was an EHM." (p.xi)

Perkins talks about his childhood and the factors that helped push him toward this life. Born in 1945, he grew up in a small New Hampshire town where his parents were teachers at a prestigious all-boys prep school. Perkins attended the prep

school and absorbed the superior attitude of students and faculty, but he and his family were not part of the wealthy elite who made up most of the student population. His frustrations from that period of his life and his eligibility for the draft during the Vietnam War era made him an easy target for the National Security Agency when they offered him a job that included draft deferment. He says that "anger at my parents, an obsession with women, and my ambition to live the good life gave them a hook; I was seducible. My determination to excel in school and in sports, my ultimate rebellion against my father, my ability to get along with foreigners, and my willingness to lie to the police were exactly the types of attributes they sought." (p.8) After finishing his bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Boston University, Perkins began his NSA training with a tour in the Peace Corps in Ecuador. He was told by NSA insiders that after the fall of Hanoi, the Amazon would become the next hot spot. Learning to live in contexts far outside the comfort zone of most North Americans and learning Spanish were important beginning steps in his training. His development was monitored by Einar Greve, an executive from MAIN, an international consulting firm, and a liaison for the NSA. Greve's assessment of Perkins' capabilities was favorable and he was offered a job as an economic forecaster with MAIN. In the process, he was also upgraded from learning to be a spy, to learning to be an EHM.

Perkins says there were two primary objectives of this work. "First, I was to justify huge international loans that would funnel money back to MAIN and other U.S. companies (such as Bechtel, Halliburton, Stone & Webster, and Brown & Root) through massive engineering and construction projects. Second, I would work to bankrupt the countries that received those loans (after they had paid MAIN and the other U.S. contractors, of course) so that they would be forever beholden to their

creditors, and so they would present easy targets when we needed favors, including military bases, UN votes, or access to oil and other natural resources.”(pp.17-18)

Perkins' book is full of examples of what he experienced as an EHM in Iran, Ecuador, Panama, Colombia, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. He tells how the EHM were the first offensive line in the economic global domination that continues unabated in the U.S. government, international corporations and a few wealthy families. If the EHM couldn't get the job of enslaving less developed nations done, the jackals, professional assassins, were brought in to eliminate leaders in those nations who stood in the way of the "corporatocracy." If the jackals failed, then an overt military solution had to be implemented. However, all-out military empire building is considered too risky since World War II and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. More covert economic means have become the weapons of choice among today's empire builders.

In this short review, I will look at only one of Perkins' examples that, I believe, is most relevant to the Thursday Theology audience and can lead to some theological discussion of this most troubling topic. After his initial time in Ecuador and some time back in Boston for more in-depth training, Perkins was sent to Indonesia in 1971. Indonesia was considered the key to keeping Southeast Asia from falling into communist hands. To ensure America's dominance in Indonesia's future, MAIN had been commissioned to construct an electrification project for the whole of Java. Perkins was to make optimistic economic growth forecasts upon which the forecasts about electrical demands of the island and hence the construction of power plants, transmission and distribution lines would be based.

The man who was making the electrical forecasts was Howard

Parker, an engineer retired from New England Electric System. Parker was unwilling to inflate the numbers, even though he well knew what his superiors wanted to hear. In private, he tried to reason with Perkins to act responsibly, but Perkins was young and still looking to make a name for himself. Perkins knew that Parker had already sabotaged his earlier career with New England because he wouldn't play the game or abandon his integrity. As they argued, Perkins said, "You'll look pretty stupid if I come up with what everyone expects-a boom to rival the California gold rush-and you forecast electricity growth at a rate comparable to Boston in the 1960s." Parker's next words struck a raw nerve in Perkins, "Unconscionable! That's what it is. You-all of you-you've sold your souls to the devil. You're in it for the money." (p.37)

Parker's words were only one of the wedges that worked their way into Perkins' conscience during his time in Indonesia. Another wedge came in the form of the poverty that Perkins saw from his window at the Hotel InterContinental Indonesia, the country's fanciest hotel. "I would look out my window, across the opulence of the hotel's gardens and swimming pools, and see the hovels that fanned out for miles beyond. I would know that babies were dying out there for lack of food and potable water, and that infants and adults alike were suffering from horrible diseases and living in terrible conditions." (p.31)

Perkins made the acquaintance of a young man named Rasmon, an economics student at a local university, and began to spend time with him outside the domain of the MAIN community. "Rasy" began to teach him Bahasa Indonesia, the easy-to-learn language that had been introduced by President Sukarno after independence from the Dutch to begin to bring together the 17,500 islands of Indonesia with their 350 languages and dialects. Rasy also took Perkins into parts of Jakarta that rarely, if ever, saw Americans or Europeans.

Perkins relates one particular night with Rasy and his friends that stands out as a turning point in his thinking about his job. They went to see a dalang – famous Indonesian puppet master. After a classical selection from ancient Indonesian texts, the dalang produced a puppet of Richard Nixon dressed like Uncle Sam. Next to him was another puppet carrying a bucket that was decorated with dollar signs. Behind the two puppets appeared a map of the Middle East and Far Eastern countries. Each country hung on a hook and Nixon would pick up the Islamic countries one by one, utter some kind of expletive (Muslim dogs, Mohammed's monsters, Islamic devils) and throw them into the bucket. When Nixon picked up Indonesia, he said, "Give this one to the World Bank. See what it can do to make us some money off Indonesia." (p.50) A third puppet was introduced at that point who represented a popular Indonesian politician. He stood between Nixon and the bucket man shouting, "Stop! Indonesia is sovereign." (p. 50) The crowd broke out in wild applause and the show was over.

Later over coffee, Perkins, Rasy and his friends discussed the show. Perkins was understandably shaken by the performance, but one young woman in the group challenged him. "'Doesn't your government look at Indonesia and other countries as though we are just a bunch of...'" She searched for the word. 'Grapes,' one of her friends coached. 'Exactly. A bunch of grapes. You can pick and choose. Keep England. Eat China. And throw away Indonesia.' 'After you've taken all our oil,' another woman added." (p.51)

Perkins asked them why they thought the dalang had singled out Muslim countries rather than the supposed "domino" countries of Southeast Asia. Again, the first young woman responded that the West, especially the U.S., wants to control the world. The Soviet Union has stood in the way, but its communist ideology is not strong enough to sustain it. Muslims have the faith to

stand against such dominating forces, even more than Christians, she said. "We will take our time," one of the men chimed in, "and then like a snake we will strike." Perkins was horrified and asked, "What can we do to change this?"

The young woman looked him straight in the eyes. "'Stop being so greedy,' she said, 'and so selfish. Realize that there is more to the world than your big houses and fancy stores. People are starving and you worry about oil for your cars. Babies are dying of thirst and you search the fashion magazines for the latest styles. Nations like ours are drowning in poverty, but your people don't even hear our cries for help....You must open your hearts to the poor and downtrodden, instead of driving them further into poverty and servitude. There's not much time left. If you don't change, you're doomed.'" (p.53)

On the last night Perkins was in Indonesia, shortly before dawn he awakened from a dream. He had seen the Christ standing in front of him. Not the fair-skinned, blond Jesus he had talked to as a child, but Christ with curly black hair and a dark complexion. This Jesus bent down and heaved something onto his shoulder. "I expected a cross. Instead, I saw the axle of a car with the attached wheel rim protruding above his head, forming a metallic halo. Grease dripped like blood down his forehead. He straightened, peered into my eyes, and said, 'If I were to come now, you would see me differently.' I asked him why. 'Because,' he answered, 'the world has changed.'" (p.58)

All of this happened in 1971.

It wasn't until 2003, after 9/11, after the birth of his daughter, after years of soul-searching that Perkins finally decided to go public with his story in this book. He'd started it many times before, but had always backed away for any number of reasons: pressure from his old colleagues, bribes to keep

quiet, unwillingness to deal with the fall-out. He had quit MAIN in 1980, but continued to live in the same circles, gradually moving away from the centers of power, but still keeping their secrets. Throughout the book Perkins swings back and forth between the calls of his conscience and the allure of his James Bond-esque lifestyle.

Though he never again relates an overtly theological moment such as the one above, Perkins does open a door for theological discussion when he distinguishes between the American republic and the global empire we have become:

“The republic offered hope to the world. Its foundation was moral and philosophical rather than materialistic. It was based on concepts of equality and justice for all. But it also could be pragmatic, not merely a utopian dream but also a living, breathing, magnanimous entity. It could open its arms to shelter the downtrodden. It was an inspiration and at the same time a force to reckon with; if needed, it could swing into action, as it had during World War II, to defend the principles for which it stood. The very institutions-the big corporations, banks, and government bureaucracies-that threaten the republic could be used instead to institute fundamental changes in the world. Such institutions possess the communications networks and transportation systems necessary to end disease, starvation, and even wars-if only they could be convinced to take that course.”The global empire, on the other hand, is the republic’s nemesis. It is self-centered, self-serving, greedy, and materialistic, a system based on mercantilism. Like empires before, its arms open only to accumulate resources, to grab everything in sight and stuff its insatiable maw. It will use whatever means it deems necessary to help its rulers gain more power and riches.” (p.150-151)

Whether or not you agree with his definitions here or his rosy portrayal of the American republic, Perkins' premise that the institutions themselves can be used for good or evil, is one very familiar to students of Luther. Throughout the Large Catechism Luther offers long laundry lists of institutions and circumstances through which God cares for the creation and of how human beings are to be about their God-given callings in the world. In the explanation of the first commandment Luther says that "we are to trust in God alone, to look to him alone, and to expect him to give us only good things; for it is he who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and all necessary temporal and eternal blessings. In addition, God protects us from misfortune and rescues and delivers us when any evil befalls us.... Although much that is good comes to us from human beings, nevertheless, anything received according to his command and ordinance in fact comes from God." (Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism, The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000, 389)

In the explanation of the First Article of the Apostle's Creed he says that

"I hold and believe that I am God's creature, that is, that he has given me and constantly sustains my body, soul, and life, my members great and small, all my senses, my reason and understanding, and the like; my food and drink, clothing, nourishment, spouse and children, servants, house and farm, etc.... Moreover, he gives all physical and temporal blessings – good government, peace, security. Thus, we learn from this article that none of us has life – or anything else that has been mentioned here or can be mentioned – from ourselves, nor can we by ourselves preserve any of them, however small and unimportant. All this is comprehended in the word 'Creator'." (Ibid., 433)

God as Creator has given human beings life and sustains us through the processes of the creation. Many, if not most, of the good things we receive and are nurtured by come through other human beings, but all of it has been ordained by the Creator. Both of these lists from Luther are describing human life from the womb. There is nothing in these descriptions that is overtly Christian. Though, of course, Luther was speaking to Christians in the Large Catechism, he was distinguishing the Creator's care for His creatures from the work of redemption that was accomplished by Jesus Christ and is carried on by the church. This distinction and its ramifications for ministry are theological threads that offer us a way to begin cooperating with God's work in the world instead of having God as an enemy. We are being judged for our greed, our willingness to look the other way and to defer making any changes in our lives that will begin to ease the burden we are putting on the rest of the world. But most of all we are being judged for our idolatry. We have turned from our Creator, the only One who can provide sustenance and nurture for His creatures. We believe that we have our own resources, that we can control, not only our own lives, but the life of the rest of the world.

It's Good Friday morning as I write this, so I suppose I'm immersed in the Passion story at the moment, but it is only the Passion of our Lord that can make any difference here. We have abandoned our callings as citizens and Christians, we have abandoned our Lord in our quest for power. Whether or not we have known about the things Perkins talks about, most of us reading these words have benefited and continue to benefit from the empire building that is happening in our name. We have been overcome by the evil inside of us and the evil which has overtaken the institutions in our country. Let us kneel at the cross, whether it be wood or bronze or shaped like a car axle, and confess our sin.

It is only His love for us, His willingness to sacrifice Himself on our behalf when we are still enmeshed in our evil that is our hope. So many of us feel stuck and don't know what to do even though we know something is terribly wrong. At the root, we can't do anything. We have been overcome by evil and only God's Messiah, Jesus Christ through His life, death and resurrection, can change the pathetic state we're in to new life. Fooling ourselves into thinking that if we just work harder or maneuver more effectively through the corridors of power we can essentially change what's going on will only feed our mistaken belief that we are in control. At bottom, there is nothing we can do, but reach out to Him and trust that He will lead us where we need to go.

After this, go back and read Perkins' chapter, "What You Can Do." Then you'll have the freedom through Christ to make a difference, a real difference.

Lastly, to our sisters and brothers around the globe who read these Thursday Theologies I plead, Don't give up on us. There are Christians in the U.S. who want to get loose from this empire building, but we are overwhelmed. Unfortunately, most of the time we still bring our arrogance and sense of entitlement to the table, but we still need your help. We know we're in trouble. First, we need our Lord and secondly, we need you to stand with us as we challenge the horror that is our foreign policy. We have been blinded by our greed and we need your open-eyed honesty, speaking the truth in love.

Pastor Robin J. Morgan

Easter Epistle from Indonesia

Colleagues,

The ThTh postings for the past two weeks have looked at Christianity “moving south.” Here’s a case study. Today’s ThTh is an interview that appeared in the current issue of THE LUTHERAN, the national magazine of the Lutheran Church of Australia [LCA]. Marie and I have been reading the magazine ever since 1994. That was our first year as ELCA Global Mission Volunteers. That first assignment was a guest lectureship at the LCA seminary in Adelaide for Ed, and work in the sem library for Marie. Through those links we’ve gotten to know and cherish Linda Macqueen, gifted editor of the magazine. She’s the interview-er. Now the interview-ee.

Our last mission volunteer stint (2004) took us to southeast Asia. An Indonesian segment of that venture found us in the city of Medan on the Indonesian island of Sumatra mingling with students and faculty at the Abdi Sabda Theological Seminary. Even though the visit was short, my conversation with professor Mangisi Simorangkir was memorable. Why? He was just winding up his doctoral dissertation at the Southeast Asia Graduate School of Theology [SEAGST] and he wanted to talk-shop about Luther’s Two-Kingdom theology. Such a topic, such a conversation, I remember! Also the teasing title of Mangisi’s dissertation: “The Two Kingdom Doctrine of Martin Luther and its Relevancy in Indonesia.” I have not seen the finished product. If/when I do, I’ll doubtless want to tell you about it.

So you can imagine our joyful surprise when the Aussie LUTHERAN [Vol.40:2] arrived with Mangisi’s photo on the cover, and Linda’s interview with him as the lead article. In September 2005 Mangisi was elected bishop of Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia [GKPI], one of the several regional Lutheran churches in that country. The interview comes to you this Holy Week for

your Easter edification.

It's not theology of glory. Christian life in this country with the most Muslims in the world (somewhere around 160 million) is precarious—as you'll see in the very opening paragraphs. Christians dying for their faith is regularly in the news—even though such news seldom gets to the west. Though urban Indonesia is “modern,” the daily life of the majority is “third-world.” National policy may be one thing, local realities are often quite different. Marie and I experienced this first hand in our 1999 short-term mission assignment there.

So here's theology of the cross from an Indonesian co-confessor for Easter Sunday 2006. Linda asks him to compare Lutheran faith and life in his native land with what he finds among Lutherans “downunder” in Australia. It sounds much like what he would find if he'd ever visit us “upover” in the northern hemisphere. Linda chose these words to put alongside Mangisi's picture on the cover: “I am where God wants me to be . . . preaching Christ.” To hear what that means in Mangisi's context, read on.

Easter Joy!

Ed Schroeder

INTERVIEW

Mangisi Simorangkir is bishop of the 350,000-member Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia, a partner church of the Lutheran Church of Australia. Linda Macqueen spoke with him in Brisbane.

MANGISI SIMORANGKIR

Bishop, it must be a difficult time for you to be away from your people, especially for those in Tangerang. Can you tell me what happened?

I was in Adelaide, at Australian Lutheran College, when I received an SMS from Petrus Hutaaruk, the pastor at Tangerang. He told me that his church had been bulldozed by a police unit, authorised by the government. Petrus was devastated. He SMSed that he cried when the bulldozer reached the altar. He said it was like Jesus being crucified again. The church seated about 200 people; they are without a place of worship now. It is very sad.

Was any reason given, or any warning?

They say it's because we don't have permission to have a church there. But it's been there since 1997 and until now there's never been a problem. Under the Indonesian constitution there is freedom of religion. But in practice it is not always that clear-cut; it often depends on the local authorities and how tolerant of Christianity they are. In some places there is persecution-in Tangerang (near Jakarta), for example. So far this year [2005], the government has authorised the demolition of 23 churches in West Java, including Lutheran ones. In that part of Indonesia, and elsewhere, local government is heavily influenced by radical Islamists. And sometimes they take the law into their own hands. Recently, in Sulawesi, a pastor and three Christian girls were shot by Islamic extremists. The worst place in Indonesia to be a Christian is, of course, Aceh. There are a lot of fanatical Islamic groups there; we call Aceh 'terrace of Mecca'.

If the constitution grants freedom of religion, is there some avenue through which Christians can object to persecution?

Yes, it is possible. But it is not necessarily wise. We are a

minority group; about 10 per cent of the population is Christian. (Mind you, that is 20 million Christians.) The vast majority of people are Muslim. When you are a minority, you do not speak up as much as you would like. It is better sometimes to suffer in silence. It is better if we work towards being friends with our Muslim neighbours and earn their respect, rather than stir up trouble with the government. We can demonstrate our friendship by assisting them through community development programs, for example, agricultural projects and training, and low-interest loans. We are not allowed to preach the gospel to Muslims, but we can show them the love of Christ in the way that we help them to improve their lives.

But there are also good relationships between Muslims and Christians, aren't there?

Yes, it is not all bad. In East Java there is a Muslim paramilitary group that helps to protect Christian churches. And in Medan there is a dialogue between Muslim and Christian leaders, in which I am involved. It operates at the leadership level only at this stage, but we hope that in time attitudes of mutual respect and cooperation will trickle through to the grassroots.

And in many places it is already happening. In northern Sumatra, where our church is based, relationships with Muslim people are very good. In Sulawesi there is a building that is a church on one side and a mosque on the other, so Christians and Muslims are worshipping literally side by side. One day the plumbing on the Muslim side failed and they didn't have any water for the ablutions that are part of their preparation for worship, so the Christians worked out a way to pipe water from their side across to the Muslims. There are many examples of good relationships.

But we Christians have to be careful that we don't upset the balance. If we are too successful in reaching into the community with our projects and programs, or if too many people are converting to Christianity, the Islamic leaders will get angry with us.

Also, there are some Christian groups that do not help us. Even though it is illegal, they actively preach the gospel all over the place: in the streets, in supermarkets and malls. I think that is not helpful. I think it is more helpful to the cause of Christ if we cooperate with the government and respect the local people and their culture. We can't, and shouldn't, impose Christianity on them. They have to be attracted to Christ because of his love that they see in us.

Your church is in the middle of an enormous mission field. How do you reach people who have no understanding of Christianity at all?

That is our big challenge and we wrestle with it constantly. Every church should be doing this, though, even churches in the LCA. All of us are working in a foreign culture and we need to contextualise the gospel so that it makes sense to the people we are trying to reach.

We can learn a lot from Ludwig Nommensen, who brought the gospel to the indigenous people (Batak) of northern Sumatra in the 1860s. Previous missionaries had been killed, but Nommensen won the people's respect by learning our culture and our language. And today there are millions of Christians in this part of Indonesia.

Nommensen gave us a good example of how to reach people: learn their culture and their language. (This is also what the German Lutheran missionaries did in Australia, with the indigenous people.) That is a big challenge in places like Indonesia,

though. In our church alone, there are seven different language groups.

Once you overcome the language barrier, you have to learn how to present the gospel in the cultural context of an ethnic group. We have to get rid of the western influences that are associated with Christianity. Indonesians don't like the West, and if Christianity is seen to be a western religion, it will not be accepted. Indonesian Christianity must be rooted in our own culture.

But it is hard to convince people of this, even many of our pastors. They think that a 'real' church is a gothic church (which looks so out of place in tropical Sumatra), and to be a 'real' pastor you have to wear a black gown and dog collar. Why don't we build Batak churches and wear traditional Batak gowns? No, we insist on looking like aliens. It is silly.

Your church has a membership of 350,000 in 1144 congregations. But you have nowhere near 1144 pastors. How do you manage?

Yes, there are only 207 pastors (30 are women) to serve all these people, who are scattered across Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan. And only 180 are based in congregations; others are in schools, in head office and so on. Our lay-people are very strong. Every Sunday about 1000 lay preachers lead worship. We have had to get away from the idea that you have to be perfectly and professionally trained in order to preach and lead worship; we have no choice but to rely on laypeople a lot more than you do in Australia and New Zealand. But we do our best to train them and prepare them. We have pastors in every region who prepare sermons and make them available to the lay preachers. Also, our magazine includes sermons that local lay leaders can use for home groups, women's groups and so on.

You might think that it is unfortunate for us that we do not

have enough pastors for all our congregations. But it is a good thing. It is good for laypeople to have the responsibility of leading a congregation; it gives them confidence, and totally involves them in ministry. It is not like they are just watching television, which can happen when laypeople sit back and leave the pastor to do everything.

Do you have a call system for pastors, as we do here in the LCA?

No, we assign pastors to parishes; they have no say in the matter. They are missionaries, and they will be sent to wherever the need is greatest. They understand that it will be this way when they enter the seminary for their training. It is the same for the women, even those with children. All our pastors are treated in the same way.

Generally they spend five years in one place, alternating between rural and urban congregations. In remote communities they are usually paid in padi (uncooked rice). We are trying to organise a centralised pay system, so that richer congregations can support the poorer ones. But we do not have many congregations with money to spare, so we constantly struggle to support our pastors properly. About 60 per cent of our congregations are based in rural villages; the people are peasants, surviving only on the food they can grow.

How do you communicate with your pastors in remote areas?

With great difficulty. Of our 208 pastors, 60 per cent don't have a telephone. Those with email I could count on one hand. There is only one email connection in our head office. A website is out of the question. You live in a different world here, where you can communicate with anyone, at any time, at the press of a button.

On the island of Nias we have a church in a remote area where there are no phones or electricity. It is like the Stone Age. After I've been there, I come back to our place and think that we are really modern!

What differences have you observed between Australian and Indonesian expressions of faith?

In Indonesia people come to church every Sunday, and I hope this tradition continues. They like to sing, even in home groups. Some pastors say that we sing too much. Typically we have nine songs in a worship service, and more than five choirs. I say, why not? If people like it, let it be part of our worship; it makes it alive.

Worship services are a bit shorter these days; now they are about one-and-a-half to two hours. On special occasions, they go to three hours. Sermons are at least 30 minutes; any shorter and people complain that the pastor didn't prepare enough. Up to an hour is normal. You will wonder how people stay awake for so long. Pastors in Indonesia get a lot more passionate about preaching than they do in Australia. They have a lot of energy in the pulpit; they get worked up and punch their fists in the air. Pastors here in Australia tend to be monotonous and too logical; they just entertain your brain and don't excite your emotions.

Another thing about our people is that they love their Bibles. In Australia people don't seem to care much about reading the Bible. Maybe it is because Bibles are cheap to buy here [in Australia]. In Indonesia they are too expensive for most people in remote areas. A Bible costs 70,000 to 100,000 rupiah (about AU\$10), which for a lot of people would be an impossible amount to save.

How do you see our churches working together in the future?

We will continue to learn from each other, not just at the church-leader level, but especially as your school students come to visit our schools and as your youth come to do voluntary work in our churches. Real understanding will happen when people at the grassroots meet each other and listen to each other's stories.

It is important that Indonesia and its churches do not get left behind. Globalisation is happening, whether we like it or not. We need to learn about the wider world, including the way the West does things, so that we can keep up with changes. When the LCA provides scholarships for our pastors to study at Australian Lutheran College, they are not only contributing to their training in theology, but are also expanding their way of thinking. Our pastors cannot afford to just sit in their own little world and culture, but must open up their eyes and ears to the wider world.

You can, of course, continue to support us financially, as you have in the past. But it is important for us to know that you support us in prayer, too-that you are aware of our struggles and are bringing our needs before God.

How do you feel, coming to Australia, seeing all this wealth and religious freedom, and then going back to your own church with all its challenges?

You have your own challenges and difficulties; they are just different from ours. Every church has its cross to bear. I don't feel envious of your church. There are many things our church can learn from yours, and vice versa. I don't want to change places; I am where God wants me to be. It is not important to be rich; if I want to be rich I will go on Eddie McGuire's Who wants to be a millionaire?

No, it is not important to be rich, not when we have something

so much better: we are saved through Christ, we have victory, a future in Christ. Preaching that, that's the important thing, wherever you are, whatever the challenges.

[As a sidebar to the Mangisi interview Linda added this paragraph from LCA mission director, Pastor Wayne Zweck, reporting on his recent visit with Lutherans in Indonesia, along with a photo of the wall-to-wall congregation he addressed.]

There were more than 1500 university students present and I preached from a pulpit high over the altar. It was an awesome experience, made all the more remarkable when I was told there were three other services that Sunday, including one in the evening which, if anything, was bigger. Hard to imagine, given the fact that the 8:00 a.m. service was literally full to overflowing. Apart from the wonderful singing, my abiding memory is of the moment we arrived. Wherever I looked there were streams of young people walking to church, all carrying their Bibles. The Sunday before I had seen something similar in Pematang Siantar. There were lots of people in town that morning and many were in their Sunday best. They were all carrying their Bibles. What a different world . . .

Luther and World Christianity.

Part Two

Colleagues,

Here is the second half of the essay “Philip Jenkins’ Global Christianity Viewed through Luther’s Lenses”Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

PART III: THE SOUTH IS COMING NORTH

JENKINS’ THESIS #3. By that time [sc. within a few decades] Christianity in Europe and North America will to a large extent consist of Southern-derived immigrant communities.

LUTHER: If these Southern-derived communities bring with them a theology-of-the-cross gospel—all will benefit. It’ll be Platzregen and Gospel ripples.

When Jenkins speaks of “Southern-derived communities,” he’s thinking of immigrant communities from the southern hemisphere who arrived in Europe and North America in the past few decades. Whether or not they bring with them, or articulate in their northern environment, a theology of the cross is not yet clear from what I know at present. That needs to be investigated and reported out. Even apart from these “Southern-derived communities,” there are samples already on the scene of such a southern-accented non-Northern cross-theology. The four samples I have in mind are not (with one possible exception) “southerners” who have come north at all. And they are not really recent either, but voices of cross-theology speaking during the last half of the 20th century. The “possible

exception," one who did not migrate to the north on his own, but whose forbears were brought there as slaves, is curiously enough marked with the word Southern. I'm referring to the cross-theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his community, The Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Cut down in mid-life because of his theology and action, he was enacting "southern" theology of the cross nearly half a century ago in the USA. Tuesday of this week was the 38th anniversary of his assassination in Memphis, Tennessee.

The other theologians of the cross whom I have in mind are two Asians and two Africans: Endo Shusaku (Japan) and Francisco Claver (Philippines), both Roman Catholics, and Gabriel Setiloane (Botswana) and Gudina Tumsa (Ethiopia), both Protestants.

I will attempt a brief presentation of MLK's cross-theology here, and treat the other four theologians in the final section about "Southern churches . . . seek[ing] their own solutions to their particular problems."

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS "NON-VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION"

The element of suffering in cross theology is obvious. King discussed that in great depth in his life and work, especially in his leadership of the non-violent direct action events in which he participated. Non-violence meant "you don't inflict suffering; instead, you bear it when it comes from the oppressors." In the training sessions for the protest marches this was a fundamental theme. And if prospective marchers finally could not say yes to that axiom, they were not permitted to march. The paradigm for non-violence for King was, of course, Jesus.

But the suffering element was not merely imitative, and surely

not Uncle Tom-ism. It was strategic for the entire movement. It was not passive pacifism—"just hit me, I won't retaliate"—but, as the last half of the motto says, it was "direct action." Non-violence linked to acts of public pressure, even coercion. I might as well tip my hand: with "non-violent direct action" King was practicing the right-hand, left-hand ambidexterity that his namesake, Martin Luther, had learned (so he said) from the Bible: God himself ambidextrously at work in the world. "Non-violence" was the Gospel in action, God's right-hand witness and work to redeem even the worst segregationist "brothers" (as King always called them). "Direct action" meant the concrete enactment of economic pressure, publicity pressure, political pressure, moral pressure—yes, all of it indeed coercive, rightfully coercive—to undo injustice and augment God's law-ful "care" of oppressed black people in America.

SUMMA: King didn't expect the pressuring action to convert segregationist hearts, but he did expect the Christic non-violence with the (right) hand extended to the racist and the audible word "Brother" from the mouth behind the hand to do just that. King saw two fundamental problems in American racism. One was coram hominibus, the human interface of segregationist laws and practices in the land. One was coram deo, the divine interface of the segregationist heart, trusting who-knows-what instead of God and his Christ. God's own law of equity-recompense—a boycott's economic pressure for a community's economic injustice, etc.—did indeed work to change the laws of the land.

But human hearts don't change with coercion. Even God doesn't (can't?) coerce heart-changes. The way God healed the coram deo problem in Christ is what King sought to enact with the brotherly hand and word, coupled with the refusal to strike back, and the acceptance of suffering when it came. Christians

claim that this was Christ's own "non-violent direct action" culminating on Good Friday. If Easter Sunday signals God's vindication both of Christ and of his method, as King proclaimed when he preached about Easter, he trusted that Easter would also work in Selma, Montgomery and Washington DC in the USA. Granted, that is an eschatological hope and confidence. Like all things Christian, King's dream too awaits confirmation on the last day.

PART IV: WHEN THE SOUTH COMES NORTH, DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE CHANGE

JENKINS' THESIS #4. Southern churches will fulfill neither the Liberation Dream nor the Conservative Dream of the North, but will seek their own solutions to their particular problems.

LUTHER: Gospel as solution to problems? Yes and No.

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS IN SOUTHERN THEOLOGIES IS ALREADY AT HAND. WILL THE PLATZREGEN PERSIST IN THE FUTURE?

We've already seen MLKing's approach to "solving the problem of segregation" in American society. I've proposed that he appropriated Luther's theologia crucis with its ambidextrous deity in doing so. His fundamental axiom of non-violent direct action makes distinctions. Distinctions about problems. The Gospel, God's work of the right hand, solves one particular problem, the coram deo problem at the divine-human interface. God's left hand attends to coram hominibus problems at the human-human interface. Important is to keep the specs straight about each hand's operation, lest both be damaged—the Gospel of redemption becoming legalized, and the law of preservation becoming emasculated.

Here are four examples of "southern" theologians of the cross—two Africans, two Asians—seeking solutions to local

“particular problems.” They all merit full-scale treatment, well beyond the limits of this essay. For two of them I give more extensive coverage; for the other two less so.

GABRIEL SETILOANE, a Methodist from Botswana, addressing the coram deo problem. [2004]

The concluding stanzas from his remarkable theological poem “I am an African” [full text may be found in Anderson, Stransky. MISSION TRENDS #3. “Third World Theologies.” 1976. pp 128-131.]

*“For ages He eluded us, this Jesus of Bethlehem, Son of Man;
Going first to Asia and to Europe, and the western sphere . .
. . .*

*“Later on, He came, this Son of man;
Like a child delayed He came to us.
The White Man brought Him.
He was pale, and not the Sunburnt Son of the Desert.
As a child He came.*

*“A wee little babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.
Ah, if only He had been like little Moses, lying
Sun-scorched on the banks of the River of God
We would have recognized Him.
He eludes us still, this Jesus, Son of Man.*

*“. . . . And yet for us it is when He is on the cross,
This Jesus of Nazareth, with holed hands
and open side, like a beast at a sacrifice;
When He is stripped naked like us,
Browed and sweating water and blood in the heat of the sun,
Yet silent,
That we cannot resist Him.*

“How like us He is, this Jesus of Nazareth,

*Beaten, tortured, imprisoned, spat upon, truncheoned,
Denied by His own, and chased like a thief in the night,
Despised , and rejected like a dog that has fleas,
for NO REASON.*

*“No reason, but that He was Son of his Father,
OR . . . Was there a reason?
There was indeed . . .
As in that sheep or goat we offer in sacrifice,
Quiet and uncomplaining.
Its blood falling to the ground to cleanse it, as us:
And making peace between us and our fathers long passed away.
He is that LAMB!
His blood cleanses,
not only us,
not only the clan,
not only the tribe,
But all, all MANKIND:
Black and White and Brown and Red,
All Mankind!*

*“HO! . . . Jesus, Lord, Son of Man and Son of God,
Make peace with your blood and sweat and suffering,
With God, UVELINGQAKI, UNKULUNKULU,
For the sins of Mankind, our fathers and us,
That standing in the same Sonship with all mankind and you,
Together with you, we can pray to Him above:
FATHER FORGIVE.”*

*The “northern” Jesus brought by the missionaries was a
theology-of-glory Jesus—“he eludes us still.” Au contraire the
Christ of cross-theology: “And yet when he is on the cross . .
. How like us he is, this Jesus of Nazareth. . . . We can pray
to him.”*

[For fuller discussion –and the full text of the poem–see Edward H. Schroeder, “Lessons for Westerners from Setiloane’s Christology,” *CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION*. Vol. 13,2 (1986) pp. 71-80.]

ENDO SHUSAKU, Roman Catholic novelist, Christian apologist from Japan, addressing the *coram deo* problem. [1996]

Endo Shusaku articulates an extraordinary *theologia crucis* in his novel “Silence.” The setting is the early generations of Christian missionaries in Japan. Sebastian Rodrigues, a young and dear Jesuit from Portugal, after years of work in Japan, finally is arrested and put on trial for his faith. No torture, just a request for apostasy. And apostasy will be but a simple act, no one but his judges will witness it. He must only place his foot on the face of Jesus crudely portrayed on a wooden plaque. It is called a “fumie.” Just step on the fumie. That is all.

Rodrigues heroically refuses. But after a while he learns the cost of his heroism. Peasant Japanese converts to faith in Christ, who have already placed their foot on the fumie are still being tortured until he, the priest, apostatizes. He hears their screams. It is indeed a diabolic persecution. The fumie is brought before him again.

Endo’s text: “The interpreter had placed before his feet a wooden plaque. On it was a copper plate on which a Japanese craftsman had engraved Jesus’ face. Yet the face was different from that on which the priest had gazed so often in Portugal, in Rome, in Goa and in Macau. It was not a Christ whose face was filled with the strength of a will that has repelled temptation. The face of the man who then lay at his feet was sunken and utterly exhausted.

“Many Japanese had already trodden on it, so that the wood surrounding the plaque was black with the print of their toes. And the face itself was concave, worn down with the constant treading. It was this concave face that looked at the priest in sorrow. In sorrow it gazed up at him as the eyes spoke appealingly: Trample! Trample! I more than anyone know of the pain in your foot. Trample! It was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men’s pain that I carried my cross.”

During all his years in Japan Rodrigues was grieved that the mental image of Christ he’d brought with him from Portugal, a beautiful image always in mind when he prayed, never spoke to him. For the first time ever in his life it was the wretched fumie Jesus that spoke to him! And if that weren’t enough, this Jesus called him to apostatize! Only a tormented Christ could speak to a tormented man. Only an agonized Christ could speak to a man in agony. The glorious Christ of power and beauty had always been silent to Rodrigues. And supremely so as he was devilishly maneuvered into apostasy for the sake of Christians converts who had already done so. Only a fumie Christ, the Christ of theologia crucis, had good words—acceptance, peace and hope—for him in such a time: “Trample! Trample! It is to be trampled on by you that I am here.”

[See Douglas J. Hall, “Rethinking Christ. Theological Reflections on Shusaku Endo’s SILENCE.” INTERPRETATION, vol. 33 (July 1979) pp. 254-267.]

SUMMA: There are surely other witnesses to explicit theologia crucis in Southern Christianity. I have in mind two more, and these I’ve been closer to. Whereas ENDO and SETILOANE above articulate a theologia crucis for the coram deo problem, these two articulated—and practiced—that theology in confronting

coram hominibus problems of oppressive political power. One is FRANCISCO CLAVER, now retired Roman Catholic bishop from the Philippines, a tireless cross-theologian during Marcos' dictatorship and in the bloodless EDSA revolution that finally toppled him. The other is GUDINA TUMSA, Lutheran churchman from Ethiopia, addressing the Marxist reign of terror that swept his country in the 1970s. For that witness he paid with his life, leading some of his fellow-Lutherans to name him "the Bonhoeffer of Ethiopia." [1979]

To review their theology here would go beyond the scope of this essay. Other scholars are at work to bring them into public view. A Gudina Tumsa Foundation exists to do just that for his life and work. Claver continues to practice *theologia crucis* in the ongoing turmoil in his native land, the harvest of which appears regularly in pastoral statements from the Catholic Bishops Counsel of the Philippines—and in other venues. ["Google" both names to learn more. I just did. 423 referencees for Claver. 535 for Gudina Tumsa.]

Articulating and then practicing *theologia crucis vis-a-vis* "particular problems" *coram hominibus*, the social-political interface, is no easy task. We saw that with King and his hard, hard work in confronting America's institutionalized racism with cruciform "non-violent direct action." For him, and for Gudina too, it led to martyrdom. The way of the cross is a way to a cross. Jesus himself said it first. "Take up your cross and follow me. Trying to save your life is a guaranteed way to lose it. Losing your life for my sake is the [only] way to save it." Luther sought to be following that master and that mantra. So much so, that he could say in his lectures on the Psalms: "*Crux sola est nostra theologia*"—the cross alone is our theology.

If southern Christians follow that mantra as they "seek their

own solutions to their particular problems," they will be blessed and so will all the rest of us – even us remnant-northerners – in "the coming of global Christianity."

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder