

# The Christmas Gospel according to St. John.

Colleagues,

I was asked to preach on Christmas Day at our congregation, Bethel Lutheran in suburban St. Louis. Which I did do. What follows is not exactly the homily, but some ramblings occasioned before, during(?) and after the fact.

1. There is no verb in the Greek NT for “preach.” The two main Greek verbs that often get translated with the English word “preach” are actually “verb-ified” nouns—keeryssein and euaggelizein. Namely, “to DO what a keeryx does,” with keeryx being “an official messenger making a you-better-pay-attention announcement” and “to DO the euaggelion,” which is “the good and new message.” So the preacher in the pulpit is “text-messaging” as that noun now gets verb-ified in today’s American English. If you opt for the verb “proclaim” instead of “preach,” as Fred Danker says we should when these two Greek verbs appear, then there is only one thing to be proclaimed. JUST the gospel. The proclaimable Gospel, when it’s being DONE, is an insertion into a specific time-space where it is not yet. Either not yet EVER been, or been—but forgotten, been—but not operative, been—but supplanted by the zillion other messages received since the last time THIS message was received.

One spinoff of that—especially for Lutherans—is that “preaching the law” is nonsense language in terms of NT vocabulary. God’s law is not something “insertable” into people’s time-space where it is not already operative. Why not? In the “old” creation, the de facto cosmos of all of

us, that law is universally and effectively operational—semper et ubique—all the time and everywhere. So when keeryssein and euaggelizein are being done, it is proclaimed into a cosmos where law, God's law, runs the show. Keeryssein and euaggelizein take place against the backdrop of that semper-et-ubique law. In the end it is proclamation "against" the law. It offers an alternative, so Elert taught us, to move from "Gesetzmässige Existenz" (law as the yardstick for everything) to "Christ-measured existence." Christ takes over as the measure of all things—finally and explicitly the yardstick for our life and callings in the always-and-everywhere "Gesetzmässig" world. Will that constitute conflict? You bet. How long? Until he comes.

So the law isn't preachable. It's already there. Sure, you'll have to call folks' attention to it when you're doing keeryssein and euaggelizein. For the Good News of Christmas comes "into" the law-FULL cosmos, but it is not "of" that cosmos, as John the Evangelist likes to say.

Since our law-FULL world is so semper-et-ubique, we readily forget that we're swimming in it. As a fish (probably) doesn't realize that its world is all water, so we with our "all" law existence, our "normal" environment. But humans are fish out of water (Darwin, you may have been on to something!). It's not that we swim around in air instead of moisture, but we're gifted with consciousness to ask about what's semper-et-ubique in our existence. That our personal cosmos is run by law is for most of us a no-brainer. Not just gravity that keeps us from flying off the planet, but the unending "you gotta do this, gotta do that" that fills every day. What renders humans back into fish-like existence, however—not back into the water, but back into unconscious UNawareness—is

that the one who is posting all this Gesetzmässig stuff onto our life-screen is God. The very same one whose image humans carry and the one who shoved us into this Gesetzmässig existence in the first place.

So that's why "Doc" R.R. Caemmerer, the guru of preaching for many of us, kept drumming into our heads that since the congregation before you on a Sunday morning is "all Christian," you might think "they already know the Gospel, so I need to proclaim other aspects of the Christian repertoire." Not so, said Doc. If there is no "explicit Gospel" in your sermon, it is a no-Gospel-sermon. And if you're not hustling the Gospel-Christum treiben, as Blessed Martin put it—there is only one other option for you to be hustling: "Gesetzmässige Existenz." And THAT message the folks do indeed know. It's semper et ubique in their lives. Their rightful response to such a sermon is "Enough already! That is really old hat. Don't you have anything Good and New to offer so that we might survive in the 24/7 law-FULL world that we're swimming in?"

2. I brought along show-and-tell items for the Christmas sermon. Artifact #A. Since the day's Gospel was John 1, I displayed Marie's 40-year old banner, on which she'd linked the John 1 text to the image of a total solar eclipse we'd witnessed way back then. The moon's total black disc covers the sun's disc on the banner, but vibrant and violent light—white, orange, red—from the sun flashes beyond the the dark circle. All this is sewn onto dark green burlap with the Johannine Christmas text in orange arching around the image: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out." It was too good not to use.

**Artifact #B.** A cell phone

**Artifact #C.** A small desk lamp with dangling cord and plug.

Before reading the John 1 text, I made two announcements. First I pointed to Marie's banner—now placed as the antependium facing the congregation on the pulpit—with “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out” circling the eclipsed sun.

Then I held up the cellphone. “Message is now a verb in our language, not just a noun. That's what this little electronic wonder has done to our language. People now ‘message’ each other with this little box. If St. John were writing his Gospel today—and in American English—he'd likely use ‘message’ instead of the word ‘word.’ So I'm going to do just that as I read John's Christmas Gospel, a text many of us know by heart, that we've heard many times before.”

So now hear this:

*The Gospel for Christmas Day 2007*

*John 1:1-14*In the beginning was the Message, and the Message was with God, and the Message was God. 2*The Message was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through the Message, and without the Message not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in the Message was life, and the life was the light-message of all people. 5The light-message shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome the light-message. 6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light-message, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light-message, but he came to testify to the light-message. 9The true light-message, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10The light-message was in the world, and the world came into being through the light-message; yet the world did not know the light-message. 11The light-message came to what was*

*his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received the light-message, who believed in his name, he gave them the right to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14And the light-message became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

SERMON THEME: WHERE DO YOU TURN THE LIGHT ON? ST. JOHN'S ANSWER: IT'S ON ALREADY. LOOK OVER THERE (pointing toward the creche in front of the altar). John tells us: "It's been done already. It's over there." The true light that gives light to everybody was coming into the world—right there. That's the answer of the Christian gospel.

Every religion has its own message for answering that question. If you watched the CBS special night before last, you heard and saw 12 of the world's religious leaders answer that question. Five of them were Christian "keeryxes"—the Lutheran World Federation President (also our ELCA presiding bishop), Pope Benedict XVI, the Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the President of the Southern Baptist Convention—all "official messengers" at the top. Joining them were 7 equally official "keeryxes" from other world religions—the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, the Dalai Lama for Buddhism and voices equally at the top for Shintos, Sikhs, Hindus and Shia and Sunni Muslims. In the end the two brothers who put it all together concluded that "There is much more that unites us than divides us. Faith in some god and love toward the neighbor. Terrorism 'in God's name' (which triggered the whole two-hour production) has no place in any of the world's major religions."

Those were 12 keeryx voices for where to turn on the light in

today's darkness and confusion. None of the 5 Christian voices—so it seemed to me—got as specific as St. John does in today's Christmas Gospel in answering the question. But then the producers gave us what they wanted us to see/hear. So we don't know what else, what all else, the keeryxes might also have said. The Christians might well have been more Christ-specific, but it didn't fit the desired pattern. And that's not really surprising. If the paradigm hoped for by the producers was "Love God and love your neighbor"—all of it law, yes good law—then explicit Gospel as the Christian alternative to "Gesetzmässig" existence and "Gesetzmässig" religion will never fit the program—for the TV production.

But my real Aha! came long after I'd turned off the TV. There was a thirteenth keeryx making official announcements all through the 2-hour production—and he got even more air-time than any of the other 12. That keeryx was the commercials coming every ten minutes or so for several minutes each time. Nobody mentioned them as the 13th evangelist, but they surely were, and they constituted the most polished, professional and crafty keeryx throughout the show. Deceptively crafty, since they did not claim to be "competition" for the official 12. But, of course, they really were. They were the keeryx for the Religion of America. "To bring light, real light, into your dark lives, get this: investment counsel, "Icy Hot" pain relief, 60% off at Kohl's for the last 24 hrs before Christmas, mouth-wash, constipation relief, half-price Reeboks, Ford's year-end sale, Chevy's hybrid, Outback Restaurants, and on and on.

That was the most compelling answer to where the light switch was in the whole 2-hour program. This keeryx really was preaching—in the "telling you what to do" sense of the verb—to us. But it was mostly preaching to the choir, I suspect, for we already believe this message. So it was being reinforced and new bits were being offered to illuminate yet this or that corner of

our lives where some darkness still held sway.

And the answer is: True Light is STUFF. Here's the Gospel of the Religion of America: "In the beginning was stuff. Anything that counts is made of stuff. Stuff is the light of humankind. Whoever has stuff has light. More stuff, more light. And the light of stuff gives you life. More light, more life.

To which John says (and we really do know this ourselves): All that stuff parading as light is just more darkness. Not at all full of grace and truth, but of the opposite—law and the lie.

[That's a very lengthy STEP 1 in the Crossings paradigm]  
DARKNESS ON THE OUTSIDE.

### **Move to STEP 2. DARKNESS ON THE INSIDE.**

Biblical prose talks about "deep" darkness. That's darkness "in here," not just out there. Darkness in Biblical vocabulary is not a nothing—the absence of light—but a something. People can be "full of darkness, love the darkness [3:19]," opt to "walk" in it. Darkness "overtakes" people [12:35]. "Whoever says he's in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still. . . . The darkness has blinded his eyes." [1 John 2:9].

Darkness is not just the absence of light, but active opposition to light. "The Light shines into the darkness, and the darkness does not/cannot stop it." But it sure would like to. If it could, it would. It's a turf war.

The darkness John is talking about in today's text is power, deadly power, but attractive power. We've just mentioned the "power of stuff" to con us into thinking it will give us life. We saw that last evening in our own Christmas Eve family celebration—14 of us gathered around the supper table first, and then the Christmas tree. We're all baptized, know the reason for

the season, even believe it (mostly). But we had to “finesse” the “True Light” agenda into the noisy and sometimes hilarious table conversation. You can guess who keeryxed this message: “Enough already. Let’s segue to Christmas carols, to Luke’s Christmas story.” Which then was read in five different languages, because the grandkids can do at least four, and then condo neighbor Fred Danker did the Greek version.

But we had to work at it, because thick slices of darkness are inside us too. We found all sorts of other stuff to talk about on this special evening, stuff that couldn’t really be squeezed under the rubric of being “amazed at what the shepherds told them.” We were soon to be more amazed at what came out of those wrapped packages under the tree. And “treasuring all these things and pondering them in our hearts?” Or “glorifying and praising God for all that we had heard and seen as it had been told us?” That was a big, big stretch. Other stuff—even other good stuff—was vying with the Light. It didn’t extinguish the light. But if it hadn’t been for the Christ-corona shining out beyond the edges of the disc of darkness, the True Light could have been eclipsed. And we along with it.

The worst thing, says John, about darkness on the inside is that Lightless = Lifeless. When the Christ-light goes out, the God-life goes out. And when the God-life goes out, you’re coming to

**STEP 3. Even worse still, DISINHERITED.** No longer “God’s kids” (v. 12) Creatures created to be God’s own kids wind up orphans. If we were created to be images of God, genetically “designed” (sic!) to run on the light-energy that is God’s own life-energy, then disinherited darklings are most pitiable indeed. Like this desk-lamp I have here, disconnected as it is from any electrical wall socket. For such a lamp to seek to turn itself on is folly indeed. Look, when I seek to take the plug and plug the cord into the lamp itself, nothing happens. So with God’s human light



fixtures too. Darkness plugged into darkness remains darkness still.

**STEP 4. THE LIGHT-BRINGER: GLOW-RY IN THE FLESH.** God-Glow in a human body. “The divine GLOW became human flesh and started shining in the human world.” Electricity as power. Think of power companies. An ice-storm comes and the “power is off.” There has to be a generator. John the Baptizer wasn’t the Generator. He pointed to Jesus. Jesus said, I’m not the primal generator either. The one I call “Abba” is. But I’m the place for you to plug in to the Abba-generator. [12:45f. Whoever sees me, sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.]

**STEP 5. BELIEVING AS LIVING, BECOMING GOD’S KIDS AGAIN** There’s an inside glow to replace inner darkness. “Believe in the light that you may become sons of light.” (12:36) Whoever believed in him he gave the right to become God’s kids (again).

**STEP 6. LIVING AS A WITNESS.** The inside glow generates an outside glow to push back the darkness. John the Baptizer is our role model. “He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.”

We’ve already been singing it in our Advent candle-lighting carol these past Sundays: “Into this dark world your Christ-light now show. Let others see your life aglow.” And just two days ago: “For truly our God no longer delays; Let your light shine these holy days! Christians be joyful with one accord! Near at hand is the Lord.”

Where do you turn on the light? It’s already there. It started at Bethlehem. The generator is now running—is still running. There is DC and AC electricity as power-source for your life. Dead/Darkness Current and Abba’s Current, Abba’s Alternate

current. When darkness gets you—outer, inner, thick, deep—disconnect from wherever you're plugged in, from whatever feeds darkness. Then go to the wall socket marked AC— Alive Current.

It's God's own Christmas present. It's for every other darkling too. It's yours when you plug in.

So . . . Plug in! And then go and glow.

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## **Angels for Advent, and Christmas too—The Message Makes the Messenger.**

Colleagues,

I had hoped for my spouse to do the text on this year's pre-Christmas posting for ThTh. But then Mike Hoy, editor of the Crossings newsletter, gave Marie a better offer and published it already as the December 2007 Crossings Newsletter. It's already on the website: <[www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org)> "Crossings Newsletters. Christmas 2007." GO and see. Once you read it, you'll remember this Maria's own encounter with an angel—in Ethiopia 12 years ago—and her vision of how the Blessed Virgin's angelic encounter REALLY happened. So with Marie's message already out there, I now have to scramble. Here's something different, but equally good: Jerry Burce's "Semi-Random Notes," he says, on Luke's Christmas Gospel. Don't let his Greek-language parentheses dismay you. Many of them are decipherable for English readers. E.g., "Decree" is "dogma." Hmmm! "All the world" is "the whole ecumene."

In a sidenote he told me: "Chief reference is Raymond Brown's book, *The Birth of the Messiah*." Brown is the scholar-expert on Luke's Christmas story. Yet Jerry's got stuff here that Brown doesn't notice. [And one reason for that is Jerry's "Augsburg Aha!" lenses for reading the Christmas story, lenses not exactly patent in Brown's work, for reasons that Jerry could tell you about.]

But back to Jerry's own prose. If some of his references to the original text prompt a "That's Greek to me!"— skip it and press on. When he's talking English, Jerry is proclaiming all the way. His notes may be semi-random, but his "Look at this!" is not random at all. It's on target. "Augsburg Aha!" one after the other. So open this package on arrival. ASAP. Don't wait till the 25th.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## ***Semi-Random Notes***

### ***Luke 2:1-20***

1. v1—"In those days a DECREE (Gk: \*dogma\*) went out from Caesar Augustus that ALL THE WORLD (\*pasan teen oikoumeneen\*) SHOULD BE ENROLLED (\*apographesthai\*)." I.e., Caesar promulgates an "ecumenical dogma" whose upshot is a great writing down of names in a book of-what? Subjugation? The Doomed-to-Die? One source suggests that the chief point of a Roman census was to assemble property records, presumably for taxation purposes; which brings to mind the later efforts of William the Conqueror

in his famous Domesday (pronounced dooms-day) Book. Woe, then, to the one whose name is written in Caesar's book. Note by stark contrast the character and outcome of the story's second dogma, this one promulgated by God through the agency first of angel and now of Christmas Eve preacher. "To you is born this day a Savior"-that was one of Caesar's titles, as ancient inscriptions attest-"who," however, "is" not Caesar (thank God!) but "Christ the Lord." The outcome here is a great writing down of names in "the Lamb's book of life" (Rv. 21:27). See also the reference, Hb. 12:23, to "the assembly (\*ekkleesia\*) of the FIRST-BORN-\*proototokoon\*, pl. of the sg. \*proototokon\* in v7 ("she brought forth her FIRST-BORN son")- who are ENROLLED (\*apogegrammenoon\*-the same verb as above) in heaven." Sweet too is the news that God's enrolling dogma is promulgated in the first instance to the supremely property-less, i.e. shepherds. Implication: whereas Caesar's dogmatic concern is not for us but for our stuff and the getting of his grubby hands on a well-sized hunk of it, God's heart is fixed squarely on our persons, his aim being at last to use his gracious hands to "wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rv. 21:4). Note finally that the scope of this second dogma, unlike Caesar's, extends beyond the \*oikoumenee\* to "the end of the earth" (\*eschatou tees gees\*), those eschatological limits of space AND time to which the apostolic heralds are directed in Ac. 1:8. Little Caesar (allusive puns intended) is forced to content himself with being ecumenical. God in his magnificent goodness insists on being nothing less than universal.

2. v7-"She wrapped him in swaddling cloths"- for a description of how newborns were handled, see Ez. 16:4 - and laid him in a MANGER (\*phatnee\*). The Lord appears in Is. 1:3, LXX [the Septuagint Greek OT]: "...the donkey

KNOWS (\*egnoon\*) the \*phatnee\* of its master (\*kuriou\*), but Israel does not know her \*kurion\*." Note then the later testimony of the shepherds, v15: what Israel knew not, the Lord has now MADE KNOWN (\*egnoorisen\*) to us. Here, perhaps, is a crack for some homiletical play, esp. if the Lord's Supper will be part of the service. As the \*kurios\* puts hay in the manger for the donkey, so the \*Kurios\* (capital kappa) puts the babe in the manger and hence the Bread of Life in paten and chalice for the silly, stubborn asses that we are, for us to eat, to live, and to bray our joy. ("Yes, O Tone Deaf One, the Christmas carols are also for you to do with this night just as cheerfully and mightily as you can manage.")

3. v8-"...watching over their flock by NIGHT." Why night? See, perhaps, WisSol. [Wisdom of Solomon, in the OT Apocrypha]18:14ff., an extended reflection on the angel's slaughter of the first-born in Egypt. "All things were lying in peace and silence, and night in her swift course was half spent, when thy almighty Word leapt from thy royal throne in heaven into the midst of that doomed land..." But as above, with the dogmas, the real interest here lies not in the similarity but in the contrast: whereas in WisSol the leaping of the almighty Word brings terror, tumult, and death, now the outcome is life, peace, and joy. In WisSol the almighty Word is like "a relentless warrior, bearing the sharp sword of thy inflexible decree..., his head touching the heavens, his feet on earth." Now that Word is a baby in a manger.
4. v9-"the glory (\*doxa\*) of the Lord SHONE AROUND (\*perielampsen\*) them." Does the Gk. ("lamping" around) hint at the sort of thing we see in the movies, where fugitives are caught in the menacing circle of the helicopter's searchlight? The English "glory" is a tough word which seems to me to be edging its way toward

obscurity. Is it still being used in everyday speech?-I'd hazard the guess that it meant much more to the average pew-sitter of 1907 than it will to the average pew-sitter of 2007. My own best stab at unfolding it, at least right now: glory = whatever it may be, whether for good or ill, that causes a person to rock back on the heels and say "Wow!" The Christmas preacher's goal, of course, is to unfold the glory of the baby in the manger, i.e. to provoke a great "Wow" in the hearers' hearts as they contemplate the mind-blistering wonder of the thing. See 9. below.

5. v9-"and they were filled with fear" (\*ephobeetheesav phobon megan\*), lit., "they feared a MEGA FEAR," no doubt as opposed to a small fear, of the sort that gets feared, e.g., when the phone starts ringing at 2 am. The King James Version, then, has it precisely right concerning the shepherds: "...and they were SORE afraid." On the subject of great fears, see the continuation of the WisSol passage referred to in 3. above, where the Word's appearance has the following effect: "At once nightmare phantoms appalled them, and unlooked-for fears set upon them; and as they flung themselves to the ground half dead, one here, one there, they confessed the reason for their deaths" (18:17-18). WisSol, of course, has it exactly right when it comes to the standard and expected consequence of a divine intervention in the dead of night. Pleasant? No. Appropriately feared? Yes. The phone does not typically ring at 2 am with good news. Nor does the spouse prod you awake at 3 am to share a pleasantry. In such a world, to find oneself suddenly encircled at 4 am by an angelic spotlight (see 4. above) is to know that destruction is at hand. How astounding then, are the angel's words: \*idou\*-"behold, look, get-it-throug h-your-fat-fear-crazed-heads" -\*euaggelizomai umin charan

megaleen\*, lit., “I evangelize-I ‘good news’-you [with] a MEGA joy.” This great joy is the direct opposite of the great fear. It consists precisely in this, that God’s nighttime intervention should turn out, this once, to be unaccountably and utterly good-so good, in fact, that it trumps the usual nastiness of all God’s other nighttime interventions: :For to you is born...a savior,” whose role (as Mt. points out, 1:21) is to “save God’s people from their sins” and from the consequences thereof. What’s more, the great joy, good-newsed to the shepherds, is now to be good-newsed to “all the people” (\*too laoo\*). Thus the Christmas Eve preaching, whose focus is on evangelizing in the strictest sense. “Fear be gone, I give you joy.” What joy? The joy of God’s promise that his Bethlehem intervention is SO good that it continues even now to trump those dreadful interventions, small AND large, which still disturb the sinner’s night-the prodding awake at 3 am., e.g., and the great fear confirmed as he groans the foul news of a heart attack in progress. Ah, but also for this wife and this husband-in the bleakness of THIS moment, especially for them-is born a Savior....

6. v14-“Glory to God in the highest (\*hupistiois\*, pl. i.e. the highest of the several degrees of heaven) and on earth peace \*en anthroopois eudokias\*, lit., in (within? among?) well-thought-of anthropods.” (Well-thought-of by God, that is.) So sings the angelic army (\*stratias\*, v13). Note how, when the host of earthly disciples takes up the song at the Palm Sunday entry, Lk 19:38, they sing of “peace in heaven.” Thus the joyous conversation.
7. vv15, 17, 19-The Gk bears witness to a conjunction between word and deed that gets lost in English. 15: “Let us go to Bethlehem and see this THING (\*hreema\*) that has happened...” 17: “...they made known the SAYING (\*hreematos\*)

which had been told them....” 19: “But Mary kept all these THINGS (\*hreemata\*) and pondered them....” See also 1:38, Mary responding to Gabriel: “Let it happen to me according to your WORD (\*to hreema sou\*). Here is one of those overarching Biblical themes: “God speaks, stuff happens.” It also appears to be Luke’s way of signaling the point that John will make manifest: “The Word became flesh.”

8. v16-“...they went WITH HASTE (\*speusantos\*).” Later on in Luke, Jesus to Zacchaeus: “MAKE HASTE (\*speusas\*) and come down....” Here Lk is tipping the theme that Mk in particular will underscore with his repeated use of the adverb “immediately.” See e.g. the call of the disciples in Mk 1 and its parallel in Mt 4. The Enacted Word (\*hreema\*) of God, now enfleshed, is so intensely good, so dripping with promise, that it demands an instant response. “See this babe-for-you in the eucharistic manger? Don’t walk, run! As in Now!” -Dare we get that vigorous?

9. Note the three other reactions to the news of God’s good wording/deeding:

A. v18-“all who heard it WONDERED” (\*ethaumason\*). But as Lk will make clear (4:22, 8:25, 9:43, 11:14, 11:38, 20:26, 24:12; also several times in Acts) this is the head-scratching bewilderment of the faithless who typically are still trapped in their fear.

B. v19-“Mary kept all these things, PONDERING (\*sumballousa\*) them in her heart.” She is literally “tossing them together.” Does this signal a mixed salad of conflicting emotions, perhaps? Might it be the equivalent of the father’s distress in Mk. 9, “Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief”?

C. vv 13, 20-“Suddenly there was with the angel a



great multitude...PRAISING (\*ainountoon\*) God and saying 'GLORY to God...' Again, "the shepherds returned, GLORIFYING (\*doxazontes\*) and PRAISING (\*ainountes\*) God..." This is the typically and distinctively Lukan reaction when God's good wording/deeding in Jesus is not only seen and/or heard but is also believed. For "glorifying" see also 4:15, 5:25-26, 7:16, 13:13, 17:15, 18:43, 23:47. Note that the last is the glorifying of the centurion as he makes his pronouncement on the innocence of the dead Jesus. Also Acts 4:21, 11:18, 13:48, 21:20. For "praising" see 8:43, 19:37, and esp. 24:53, when the disciples return to Jerusalem after the ascension. Also Acts 2:47, 3:8-9.

All three of these reactions are possible, Luke suggests, when a Christmas sermon is rightly preached. The last of the three, i.e. the glorifying and praising of God, is by far the preferred outcome. It cannot, of course, be commanded. Indeed, should we be so foolish as to tell the hearers that they OUGHT to be glorifying and praising God for all they've seen and heard, the certain consequence will be reaction (A), bewilderment and hardened fear. Thus our sole and exclusive task as preachers is to make like the angel (and thereafter, v17, like the shepherds) by "evangelizing the great joy." To repeat: "thus did God do in Christ that night; therefore so is God continuing to do for you in Christ THIS NIGHT." And if by the Spirit's pentecostal blowing the hearing issues forth in believing, then new nature will run its course and there will be much by way of "glorifying and praising God" in our corner of Northeast Ohio [=Jerry's home turf] that night. Therefore we pray, already now: "Open thou my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may show forth thy praise." And again: "Create in us-hearer AND preacher-a clean

*heart, O God, and put a new and right Spirit within us.”  
Veni Creator Spiritus. Come, Creator Spirit. Amen.*

*Jerome Burce*

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# **“Living Well. The Balanced Life.” – The Christmas-issue theme of THE LUTHERAN, the magazine of the ELCA**

Colleagues,

Fortnight ago I put a PS at the end of ThTh 494 asking for input. Nobody responded. So maybe it's a dumb idea. But I'll try once more—this time right up front, a pre-script. If the deafening silence continues, I'll stop.

*Postscript for the immediate future: God willing, on January 10, 2008—four weeks hence [now it's four]—Thursday Theology number 500 will be posted. I want to celebrate that “D-date” [D = 500 in Roman numerals] by taking the day off, and letting you, you all, produce the text. So I'm asking the willing among you to compose a sentence, a few lines, a paragraph (not too big) which, when scissored and pasted, will constitute the text for ThTh #500. For all contributions that come in, Mike Hoy and Steve Kuhl, (past and present presidents of Crossings Inc.) will constitute the scissors-and-paste committee. If Mike and Steve get surfeited with so much good stuff from y'all, perhaps*

*I can take the following Thursday—or even several?—as days off as well. Not fishing for kudos—nor brickbats either! Something like a Krossings Karaoke, an “open mike” where the readership can sing to the readership and we provide the cyberspace mike, the stage—and, if necessary, Steve and Mike as umpires. Identify your prose as “4TT500.” Post to <mehs55-AT-cs.com> by New Years Day.*

Here is the text for ThTh #496, a letter to Daniel Lehmann, Editor of THE LUTHERAN, the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

[To see THE LUTHERAN (December 2007) online, GO to <<http://www.thelutheran.org/article/issue.cfm?issue=146>> Click on “Cover story” and “Columnists” for texts discussed below. Unfortunately, “faith alone” is insufficient for getting the full text online of all but one of these referenced articles. “Works”—and wherewithal(!)—required.] OK, Dan, you asked us to do this.

*“Let us know what we’ve done right, what needs improving . . . .” is your invitation on the editor’s page in the December 2007 issue of THE LUTHERAN [p. 4]. And for cantankerous types like me you offer this advice: “If one author [among our theological pieces] disappoints you, rest assured one from the other end of the spectrum will appear in a future issue.”*

1. “Right” is Bishop Hanson’s message on the last page which contradicts the three feature articles at the center of this issue. Yes, contradicts. Not just “one from the other end of the spectrum.” See evidence below.
2. “Right” is also the central item [Exercise 2] of Blezard’s study guide, p. 18.
3. What makes these two right is that they “need Christ” in

order to make their pitch. That is the fundamental Martin-Lutheran dipstick for all Christian theology and practice. "Necessitate Christ" is the way Bob Bertram used to render that axiom into English. Any proposal that claims to be Christian and doesn't "necessitate Christ" is NOT just at "the other end of the spectrum." It's working with a completely different prism, offering an "other" rainbow. In short, an "other" gospel. In such cases St. Paul does not suggest we "rest assured [that] one from the other end of the spectrum will appear in a future issue," as you counsel us.

4. If folks can't divine that an "other" gospel is not the "real" one, how will they even know what "the other end of the spectrum" is? Your counsel to "rest assured" is not assuring, nor rest-inducing. Paul knocks himself out in that Galatian epistle to counter other gospels. No "resting assured." For the stakes are high when other gospels circulate. It's not variations on a theme or colors on a spectrum. It's the whole ball of wax. When other gospels flourish, he claims, "then Christ died for nothing." [Gal. 2:21]
5. Editorial policy proposal. Could you not vet the theological articles you publish by this "simple" dipstick? "Necessitate Christ or not necessitate Christ." And in your "sorry, we can't use your article" return-letter you tell the disappointed author: "We have that word LUTHERAN in our magazine title. 'Fact is, that's the ONLY word we have. And we even have the chutzpah to use the definite article. We claim to be 'THE Lutheran.' For us that means "necessitate Christ," the cardinal dipstick of the Lutheran Reformation. Our editorial team reads all theological submissions through those lenses. We are fallible, so we may be wrong. But we couldn't find it in your prose. There are other journals that use other

criteria for vetting what they publish. So you do have other options. Peace and joy! Dan."Back to the three feature articles.

6. Parker Palmer's opening piece, "Living Well," fails the test. Not only does Christ not even get mentioned—and thus surely not necessitated—but even God doesn't make the cut in PP's prose. And what is PP's actual "gospel" for the "wholeness of living well?" After paragraphs of confessing the sins of his "divided life," he tells us: "All we need to do is to bring down the wall that separates us from our own souls and deprives the world of the soul's regenerative powers." And why trust the "soul" for salvation? Answer: the standard (American? Emersonian?) gospel: "The soul is generative...wise...hopeful...creative." Thank you Jesus, you're not needed here. Dan, how can such an other gospel not get caught when your team checks it out at the office? And for the Christmas issue!

OK, so it's Parker Palmer. Marvelous writer that he is, he's not operating on any patent Lutheran spectrum. But PP surely doesn't need the ELCA to hustle his "other" spectrum of the soul. He's already got a humongous following. In today's Mars Hill melange of messianic messages, were Blessed Paul on the scene, he'd surely say: "My gospel is a different one from all those others being hustled here in the marketplace. Mine's about a crucified and risen Messiah, a.k.a. a baby in a manger. I know it sounds wild, but let me tell you about it, anyhow. Especially if you're intent on that classical Greek virtue of 'sophrosyne,' which someday will be rendered in English as 'wholeness.' That's exactly what this Messiah's offer is. And when you tune in here, you'll see that the other offers don't even come close. Including the one that urges you to harvest the powers of your own soul."

7. In the second theme article Diane Jacobson does indeed have Christ (6x)—and God too—present throughout her essay. So she's on a different spectrum from Parker Palmer. That's clear. But "necessitate" Christ? Nope. Granted, she's a professor of the Old Testament. And her "God's shalom = wholeness" message is solidly OT grounded. She even hypes God's "promises," a term that's necessary when you are necessitating Christ. But she never gets beyond the OT in spelling out the substance of her promise-message. She never tells us how/why Christ is "necessary" for all those shalom promises to be trustworthy. Moses, Hannah, prophets, psalmists all get their due. But she gives no signals as to "how" those shalom promises are fulfilled—so Christians claim, don't we?—other than to assert it (sortuv) in her second-last sentence: "God's peace is ours decisively through the cross of Christ." If it is indeed decisive, Diane, then SHOW US how that is true, how the cross of Christ completes, fills-full all these OT shalom texts you commend to us. A throw-away line at the end, axial as it indeed is, doesn't do it. Surely not for a Christmas issue.
8. John Kirkpatrick's counsel in the third theme article is good "left-hand kingdom of God" stuff. The fact that he doesn't need to mention Christ at all to ground his case is understandable. God has other agents and agencies in place to administer God's law of preservation. Christ is not necessary here. That's very Lutheran. Kirkpatrick's counsel highlights God's left-hand regime of "caring" for creation, and us as primal agents for just that divine task. But that's not God's redemption agenda—where "balance" and "imbalance" are matters of everlasting life and death. To address that "balanced life" topic, you need to "necessitate" something else. Someone else. Suppose you had asked Kirkpatrick: "Give attention to the Babe in the

manger, if you can, as you tell us about 'Living a Balanced Life.'" What might he have come up with? All the more useful that would be—and edifying—because he is not (I'm guessing) a salaried theologian, but an MD and "chief medical director for THRIVENT," thus a layman with a high calling in an outfit that impacts thousands of your readers. How about a sequel from him doing just that?

9. Blezard does it "right." Finally! His Study Guide pushes us to work through John 10 –Jesus the Good Shepherd—to get the specs on "the abundant life we have in Christ. How Jesus gives us wholeness again." And I like the "again." The three major articles don't get us to THAT wholeness. They leave us still frazzled. We do indeed need it "again" after listening to them. Hal lelujah for Blezard.
10. But super Hallelujah for the Bishop on the last page. He fesses up in the very first sentence that he is NOT going to follow the path proposed by the theme articles: "I have grown weary of trying to lead a balanced life." Why? "Striving to achieve and maintain balance functions like God's law. It reveals both God's desired intent and my failure." Though he gives a nod to Jacobsen and Kirkpatrick, he eschews PP completely. And for good reason. He's writing an Op Ed piece "contra" PP. And even his mini-kudos for Jacobsen and Kirkpatrick fade away when he articulates his own proposal for "centered rather than balanced" life. And the center is You know Who. Hanson then proceeds to spell it out—no shibboleths, no throw-away lines: "The challenge to lead a balanced life . . . is law without gospel. It is God's command without God's promise. It denies or disregards that wholeness is God's gift to us in Christ Jesus and is therefore devoid of both the cross and the resurrection."

Didn't anyone on your editorial team notice that our leader was saying "away with them" to those Christ-less

three feature essays?

Is this what you meant in your own p. 4 opening Christmas letter as you said: “We’re giving the presiding bishop a more prominent position”? Prominent, not in giving him more space, but prominent in having him be our “teaching bishop?” Necessitating Christ when others don’t? GO for it. Do indeed give him such increased prominence. People have pestered you (I’ve done so too) about the mish-mash of less-than-Lutheran theology that surfaces in our magazine. Also about the “official” theology coming from the church headquarters in this or that declaration. But if the ELCA’s “official” theology is that of our chief “official” as proclaimed in his “page at the end,” then that just might be Christmas present enough for all us readers in this December’s issue.

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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## **When You Need to be Healed, You’re a Mission Field**

Colleagues

Back in October—six postings ago—a “Mission Festival” sermon was sent your way. It was originally preached where Robin Morgan is pastor in Washington, Missouri, an hour’s drive west of St. Louis. The Sunday thereafter I was asked to “do likewise” in the opposite direction, east across the



Mississippi River with two rural congregations in southern Illinois. Since the scripture readings for the day were new, I couldn't just use the "old" sermon. And these new readings were too juicy to leave untasted. Here's what bubbled up from those basic ingredients when I did just that. Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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## ***Mission Festival.***

***October 14, 2007***

***St. John's Lutheran Church, Bremen, IL (9:00 a.m.)  
and Peace Lutheran Church, Chester IL (10:30)***

### ***Texts (in shorthand):***

- A. 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15 Naaman the leper and Elisha the healer.*
- B. 2 Timothy 2:8-15 Remember JC raised from the dead = Paul's gospel. Paul suffers for this Gospel, "toughs it out," so that the elect obtain salvation [Greek: soteria] in CJ with eternal glory. Here's a "faithful" [Greek: pistos] saying: If we..., then we... (2x affirmative) die/live and endure/reign. If we . . . , then he. . . (2x negative) we deny, then he deny; [BUT] if we faithless/ he faithful [pistos] for he cannot deny himself. Caveat about logomachy. Final exhortation for Timothy to be a "straightshooter" [Greek: orthotomounta, literally a "straight-cutter"] about the word of truth.*
- C. Luke 17:11-19 Ten lepers cleansed, one healed. Faith saves. [Note three different verbs]*

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*For this Mission Sunday/Mission Festival we've got 3 readings about healing. The first and last are lepers getting healed, and St. Paul's words in the second reading to one of his students speaks of "the soteria (healing) that is in Christ Jesus."*

**SERMON THEME:**

*Part 1: When You Need to be Healed, You're a Mission Field.*

*Part 2: When you do get healed, you're a missionary.*

*We'll start with NAAMAN AND ELISHA The secret is in the prophet's name.*

*Naaman's Problem*

*He's a big shot. Head honcho of the Syrian Army. What's his problem? Leprosy? Worse than that. His Syrian gods don't heal!*

*Then of all things this Israeli slave girl, never named, who does the housework, says: "We've got a prophet in Israel who could do it." HIS NAME TELLS THE WHOLE STORY. It's Eli-sha. A full sentence in Hebrew: "My God heals." No Syrian gods heal.*

*Naaman's no dummy. Get to the guy whose God heals!*

*And it happens in such a low-key way, with no razzle-dazzle, that it almost keeps Naaman from getting healed.*

*And Naaman becomes a missionary!*

*"Now I know that there is no God [who heals] in all the earth, except in Israel."*

*Imagine what he told everybody when he got back to Syria. When you need to be healed, you're a mission field. When you get*

healed, you're a missionary.

But he's the second missionary in the story. Who was the first one? Of course, the never-named girl brought back from Israel—doubtless from Naaman's earlier military exploits—as a slave.

Before we move on we need to take a look at Naaman's sickness. How sick IS he really? Three levels—outside, inside, God-side.

OUTSIDE leprosy INSIDE “heart-problem” Martin Luther's definition for a god: what's he hanging his heart on in his hope to be healed? Stuff. His own stuff. Look at all the stuff he brings along to “pay the doctor.” When the healing comes as a freebee, a freebee OFFER, he almost blows it. Because of what his heart's hanging on.

GODSIDE No connection with a God who heals. First of all a God who heals the “No-connection with God” sickness.

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Which brings us to today's Gospel

Same sort of story, but with add-ons. Biggest add-on, of course, is Jesus,

What's Jesus's name in the Hebrew dialect they spoke in Jesus' day? Yeshua. Like the word Eli-sha, that's a whole sentence. “God is healing.” Doing the healing IN Jesus. That's a jump up from Eli-sha. God in person on the ground doing the healing.

Three verbs are central here in this Luke text.

Cleansed, healed, saved. The way Luke uses these three they are different, not all the same, not synonyms.

*Diagnosis and Prognosis. Three steps down, and three steps up.*

*Need to be healed, mission field, but only one of the 10 became a missionary "When he saw that he was healed, he turned back, praising God with a loud voice." What's that? Missionary!*

*When you need to be healed, you're a mission field. When you get healed, you're a missionary.*

*And then to Paul in his counsel to his pastor-student Timothy to get the picture of how this all works. You might be tempted to say that this is addressed only to pastors, folks such as Timothy. But if all faith-in-Jesus folks are healed-ones, and if the healed-ones then become missionaries, then Paul is talking to all of us here this morning, right here in Randolph County, Illinois. Whether we're "officially" preachers or not. Listen.*

*[WALK & TALK through the Timothy text.] REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST, RAISED FROM THE DEAD . . . . THAT IS MY GOSPEL. That is the "soteria," the medicine that heals the God-problem. With the God-problem healed, the heart-problem gets healed. And in two of today's three cases also the outside sicknesses.*

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*And now to us here in Randolph County.*

*Pastor Reuter is not your paid missionary. When you get healed, you can't hire a substitute to live your healed life. Did you notice who were the missionaries in these Bible stories? Naaman, the servant girl, the guy just healed by Jesus. Never went to a seminary. Never got ordained. They JUST got healed. And that was it. That made them missionaries.*

*Jesus is no dummy. "As the Father sent me, so I send you." That's what he said to the healed-ones the first time they saw*

him after Easter. "I send you right back to the daily life places where you live." Who knows better than you what the sicknesses all are—especially the God-sickness—of the folks you live with? Surely not Pastor Reuter. Who knows better than you what they are hanging their hearts on? Who knows how these other Gods really are NOT gods that heal? Who knows better than you?

And even more: Who is THERE on the spot? Right on the scene to be the missionaary? To be the "little girl," the one-in-ten who got healed all the way through? Or even the big-shot Naaman, the CEO, the manager, the boss running the business, the head honcho of this or that?

If you grew up like I did (also an Illinois farm boy), you probably always thought "mission and missionaries" was in some other place in the world. Overseas, but not here in Randolph county.

But today's texts are telling us something else. They are talking about us, all of us here in church this morning: When you need to be healed, you're a mission field. When you do get healed, you're a missionary. Our texts show us that it's the God-problem, the root problem, that needs healing. So the only conclusion is: the whole world is a mission field. Not just the strange people overseas. That's the Bible's mission mantra: "Mission on all 6 continents." America is a mission field. This southern Illinois part of America is too. Randolph county, a mission field. And you, you all, are the missionaries. Even if you've never thought of it before and never said it before, say it now. "Randolph county is my mission field."

You know I didn't just think this up. It comes from the Word of God. It comes from Jesus: "As the Father sent me, so I send you." The same medicine that heals your God-problem works for

*everybody's God-problem. And you live with these folks day in and day out. You are not in these relationships, in these situations, just by accident. Christ says he "sent you" there. Right there into these very places with these very people.*

*It takes courage to be a missionary—not just overseas, but probably even more right here at home. St. Paul's words to Timothy tell us where the courage comes from. He tells Timothy that the "saying was true" for him. It's true for us too:*

*If we die with Christ, we live with Christ.*

*If we endure, we reign.*

*If we get shaky (faithless), he remains faithFULL, For he cannot deny himself.*

*Remember, his very name is "God is healing." He can't deny that. He can't say he's somebody else. And he won't. That's his promise. When someone gives his life for you, you can surely trust his promise.*

*Amen.*

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## **Arthur Carl Piepkorn. A book-review. Part II.**

**THE SACRED SCRIPTURES AND THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS.  
SELECTED WRITINGS OF ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN,**

**Ed. Philip J. Secker. Mansfield, Connecticut: CEC Press. 2007. Paper. \$21.95**

**[To order GO to <[www.lutheransonline.com/piepkorn](http://www.lutheransonline.com/piepkorn)>]**

[Here's the final paragraph segue from last week's Part I: The BBSW bunch (=Bertram, Bouman, Schroeder, Weyermann in the department of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary) wanted to go one step further: Yes, the Gospel is indeed the central "doctrinal datum in the sacred scriptures." It is, in fact, so central that in the Lutheran Confessions the Gospel itself becomes the "norm" for the Bible. And the Gospel, when "properly distinguished" from God's law, its polar opposite, becomes the criterion for how to read that entire Bible that testifies to this one "doctrina evangelii." But to call that THE Lutheran hermeneutic for reading the Bible? ACP didn't think so.]

### **LAW-GOSPEL DISTINCTION—A HERMENEUTIC?**

Law distinguished from Gospel as the lenses for reading the Bible? ACP didn't want to say that. "I prefer to speak of a law-gospel polarity (rather than a law-gospel antithesis). . . . the law-gospel distinction is a particularly useful hermeneutical criterion in dealing with the sacred scriptures; but it must not, in my view, be exalted to the place where it is the primary or the exclusive hermeneutical criterion. When it does become the primary or exclusive hermeneutical criterion, the tremendous 'bite' of the law-gospel distinction is lost." (286)

ACP is talking to our quartet when he says this. Yet I never did comprehend what that "bite" was, a bite that got lost in the BBSW mode for confessional theology and sadly, I never asked him point-blank. For his side, ACP was never convinced that law-promise hermeneutics proposed in Apology 4 of his beloved Lutheran Symbols—a hermeneutic drawn from "the central exegetical criterion of the Symbols" [ACP's very words]—was THE

Lutheran hermeneutic for reading the Bible. For ACP it was “a” Lutheran hermeneutic, not “the.”

There may be a hint in the last essay in the book, one of the last things he wrote before he died. Here ACP is responding—from the battlefield of the LCMS civil war—to a “request” from LCMS officials that each of us Concordia professors put down in writing our own personal statement of faith, with specific attention to some half-dozen specific topics. One of those topics was: “The Relation between the Law and the Gospel.”

Here’s what ACP says:

*“I regard the conventional Lutheran law-gospel polarity as a denominational construction which is derived from data of the sacred scriptures, although the sacred scriptures do not explicitly distinguish the law from the gospel, as Lutherans understand these terms. I hold that in the sense that the terms have in Lutheran theology, the law and the gospel are ultimately functions of the Word of God. That is, for the Christian every word of God, however conveyed, has both a law function and a gospel function. . . . To stress the fact that the law and the gospel, as Lutherans understand the terms, are functions that inhere in the word of God, I prefer to speak of a law-gospel polarity (rather than a law-gospel antithesis).”*  
(p285)

I have a hunch that the synodical officials who might have read these words would scarcely have a clue concerning what he was talking about with these distinctions. Even less, I suspect, would they have had a clue that ACP was also stating his “HERE I stand” vis-a-vis his BBSW colleagues, even though by that time we were all his allies, and he ours. And in a few months we, together with him, would be designated “intolerable” false teachers at the LCMS New Orleans convention.



ACP was part of the “faculty majority,” the 45 (of a total of 50) profs already fingered as suspect in our teaching long before the synod convention. So he was clearly together with us on the side of the accused. Yet his words above, “as Lutherans understand these [law and gospel] terms” make me wonder if he didn’t see that it was precisely THIS that he and our quartet were debating. What is the “right” way to “understand these terms” that constitute a cardinal Lutheran axiom? Disagreeing with ACP, our quartet did indeed see the terms as antithetical to each other. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” and “Son, be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven” are either/or assertions. Antithetical. One is bad news, one is good news.

ACP held that “every word of God, however conveyed, has both a law function and a gospel function.” So every word is BOTH law and gospel. That. says ACP. is a “Lutheran understanding of these terms.” Our quartet said Not so. One word kills (so says Paul) and one word makes alive. The same word doesn’t do both. My hunch is that ACP is here drawing on the grand patriarch of Missouri, C.F.W. Walther, from his pioneering lectures on L&G in the early years of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Walther does not use L&G for Biblical hermeneutics in these lectures, but as a “hermeneutic” for pastoral practice. And here and there Walther does say that the same word of God, a specific Biblical text, can work sorrow or work joy in a pastoral situation depending on the parishioner’s specific circumstances. Yes, that is “a” Lutheran understanding of these terms. But is it “the” Lutheran understanding of these terms? Is that the best Lutheran understanding of these terms? Some of us didn’t think so.

It’s certainly not the “Lutheran understanding of these terms” that some of us learned from Elert when he led us into the Lutheran Confessions. Here are some quotes: “The law is God’s judicial action; it concretely effects God’s curse and wrath.” “The gospel promises a change from life under the law. Faith

trusts that promise, and in doing so faith IS a change of existence." "Law and gospel stand in substantive dialectical opposition to each other. When the law speaks, the gospel is silent. When the gospel speaks, the law must hold its peace." [Elert: "Law and Gospel," Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967, p. 1]

I have a hunch that ACP's preference for the term "function" instead of the term "use" is in the mix here too. He viewed L&G as "words" of God functioning when scripture is read, when a sermon is preached, when pastoral care transpires. Elert would stick with the term "use," with the accent on God himself "using" L&G to effect God's "curse" or God's promise.

I never pursued this issue with ACP. Better said, I didn't have it in focus. I don't know whether any of my colleagues in the quartet—all of them now also dear departed—ever did either, although I bet Bob Bertram did. He had 8 collegial years with ACP before I arrived. It seems to me that it is the LCMS "understanding of these terms"—inherited from Walther—to see them in "use" by human agents, pastors of course, as they minister the word of God to other people. The Elert proposal (and I think that's the ancient "understanding" in Luther and in the Lutheran Confessions) is more existential by focusing on God as the agent enacting one or the other.

Phil Secker has a passage posted on the ACP website—it's not in this volume—that shows ACP getting close to the BBSW alternative I've proposed above. But he still holds that "both Law and Gospel are functions of the same Word of God." Did he see a schizophrenic deity looming in the radical either-or that the BBSW crowd seemed to him to be promoting? That is a serious concern. But it is not removed by positing some unitary primal Word of God behind the conflict of law and gospel. [Karl Barth did indeed propose that, but I never heard ACP hyping Barth.]

The resolution of that antithesis, that “substantive dialectical opposition” of law and gospel, came on Good Friday—in Christ’s body on the tree. And not before. But that still doesn’t make “the same Word of God” to be both bad news and good news for sinners. “Today you will be with me in paradise” is pure Gospel. There’s no law-like flipside to that promise.

Here’s the text Phil Secker offers, where—so it seems to me—ACP seeks to say both:

*“Although the Gospel is bound to the Law as its polar opposite, although both Law and Gospel are functions of the same Word of God, and although the Law is illustrated and declared by the Gospel (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 18), the Gospel as a principle stands wholly outside of and in paradoxical contradiction to the Law. It is God forgiving the unforgivable, accepting the unacceptable, justifying-in St. Paul’s bold image-the ungodly. Here there is no application of justice-attributive, distributive, retributive, or merely, with Tillich, “tributive.” Here is not even creative justice. Here is love, forgiveness, the Father so loving the world that He gave His only Son, the Son taking upon Him to deliver man from the curse of the Law and abhorring neither the womb of the Virgin nor the death of the Cross, the Holy Spirit communicating Himself anew to those that had lost the life of God.” Arthur Carl Piepkorn, “What Law Cannot Do for Revelation,” unpublished essay, October 21, 1960, pp. 17-18.*

## **BACK TO THE TERM “CANONICAL”**

Additional signals of ACP’s viewing the Lutheran Confessions as a doctrinal canon show up in some of his favorite terms. One of these is his oft-repeated reference to their “doctrinal content.” Commitment to the Lutheran confessions is commitment to their “doctrinal content.” One example: “The Symbolical Books

. . . restate the doctrinal content of the Sacred Scriptures.”  
(267)

Then there is his frequent use of the words “binding, bound” with reference to scripture and to the Confessions. Granted, this term was standard LCMS parlance in those days. Some of us in those days searched for other vocabulary, less law-like, to speak of commitment to scripture and doctrine. ACP opted to stick with the old rubric and still be engaged in “Christum treiben.” In his 34-page article on “Suggested Principles for a Hermeneutic of the Lutheran Symbols” (106-139), he goes through a laundry-list of several pages designating over and over again what is “binding” and where “we are not bound.”

Using both of these “canonical” terms, he tells us: “What Lutherans are bound to is the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Symbolical Books.” (271)

A canonical view of the confessions designates what’s obligatory, what’s binding about them. I never saw any sign that this binding was bondage for him. Au contraire, from all the evidence I ever saw and heard, he rejoiced in it. But that is where ACP stood.

REHABBING THE WORD “CATHOLIC” AND “CATHOLIC” PRACTICE AMONG LUTHERANS ACP sought to rehabilitate the term “catholic” within the LCMS and in Lutheranism beyond. If you knew ACP at all, you knew that.

“The [Lutheran] Symbols are precisely intended to be a Catholic interpretation of the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and the New Testament.” (107) “The Church in the process of Reformation must remain the catholic church.” (183) “All the Symbols stand in a continuous chain of Catholic witness . . . . We are Catholic Christians first, Western Catholics second, Lutherans third.”(109)

That last sentence became the mantra of many of ACP's disciples. So much so that some among these Piepkornians have in recent years swum the Tiber and gone back to Rome. Though that was not at all what ACP was recommending. [And the swimmers know that they are departing from their master as they start paddling.] ACP often asserted the bizarre-sounding thesis that today's fellowship of the Augsburg Confession of 1530 (Augsburg catholics) was actually older than today's Roman Catholic community. For when the Church of Rome at the Council of Trent (1546ff) anathematized the doctrine of "justification by faith alone," Rome was renouncing the historic Western catholicism that the Augsburg confessors confessed. With that pronouncement the Church of Rome became a separate denomination—in the technical meaning of the term, a "sect." Augsburg kept the Catholic faith, Trent did not. So when Augsburg catholics, disgruntled with the "mess" in their current Lutheran denominations, swim the Tiber hoping to become 100% catholics, they are sadly opting for a lesser catholicism than the one they are leaving behind.

ACP was an early and formative voice in liturgical renewal in US Lutheranism. He also agitated for the recovery of what the Lutheran Confessions call the third sacrament: "One area where the practice of contemporary American Lutheranism has departed far from the practice enjoined by the Symbols is in the area of private confession and individual absolution." (164)

In my student days ACP's public persona—given his constant clerical collar, his crossing himself at specific places in the liturgy—was suspect for having "Romanizing tendencies." That was the Missouri epithet in those days for the high-church crowd, including students on campus, the ones rehabbing the term "catholic" as good orthodox Lutheran vocabulary. ACP was their guru. He was "Father Piepkorn" to them.

## ACP AND THE ARTWORK OF ELISABETH REUTER

One of the gifts ACP brought to campus was the work of artist Elisabeth Reuter, originally from Crimmitschau in what became East Germany. I think he learned of her work during his time as military chaplain in post-WWII Germany. Through ACP's mediation four of us seminarians made contact with Ms. Reuter and from her powerful woodcut series—from the Annunciation to the 12-year-old Jesus in the temple—we began a contemporary art Christmas card company, The Seminary Press. It ran for 25 years with wife Marie being the manager/operator for the last 20 of them. We have a set of that eight-panel Reuter series on our wall. But that brings up this question for you ThTh readers. Our set of eight is in black and white. To ACP, who also promoted her art in other venues, Elisabeth had given a brilliantly colored set of those woodcuts. I remember seeing them, framed in one composite panel, on the wall of the Piepkorn living room. Now this—none of the Piepkorn children knows what happened to that Elisabeth Reuter objet-d'art after ACP, and then later his wife Miriam, died. Have any of you readers ever seen it, or know what happened to it? If so, the Piepkorn heirs would like to know.

### Summa.

ACP was dear to me and continues to be so in blessed memory. We weren't always on the same page, but we enjoyed walking together through the pages of Lutheran confessional theology to which we both were joyfully committed. He was regularly doing giant steps to my baby steps. [Even though I never walked in his giant-sized moccasins, I did once wear his cassock! Of all places, in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada! And now get this—when I was guest-preacher in an Anglican church! And now get this—the rector there who vested me in it was a St. Louis seminary grad. The vestment was genuine. The ACP initials were embroidered inside the collar. How it had gotten into this Anglican vestment

closet is an almost gothic tale: "It was a dark and stormy night . . . ." But that's another story.]

ACP was a giant blessing for me, for which I give thanks, not only in this time of American Thanksgiving Day. I'm grateful to Phil Secker for dreaming up and then setting up the ACP Center and seeing to it that "his works do still follow him" now already 34 years after "they thought they could retire him, but God took care of that." For me ACP incarnated God's care-taking—both as he received it and as he put it into practice. Evangelical and catholic. Gospel-grounded and world-wide.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. Crossings general manager, Cathy Lessmann, just reminded me that Bob Bertram wrote an "ACP In Memoriam" many years ago. It's a gem. To find it GO to <[www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org)>. Click on "Works by Bob Bertram" and then on "Piepkorn in Perspective."

### **Postscript for the immediate future:**

God willing, on January 10, 2008—six weeks hence—Thursday Theology number 500 will be posted. I want to celebrate that "D-date" [D = 500 in Roman numerals] by taking the day off, and letting you, you all, produce the text. So I'm asking the willing among you to compose a sentence, a few lines, a paragraph (not too big) which, when scissored and pasted, will constitute the text for ThTh #500. For all contributions that come in, Mike Hoy and Steve Kuhl, (past and present presidents of Crossings Inc.) will constitute the scissors-and-paste committee. If Mike and Steve get surfeited with so much good stuff from y'all, perhaps I can take the following Thursday—or even several?—as days off as well. Not fishing for kudos—nor brickbats either! Something like a Crossings Karaoke, an "open mike" where the readership can sing to the readership and we

provide the cyberspace mike, the stage—and, if necessary, Steve and Mike as umpires. Identify your prose as “4TT500.” Post to <mehs55@cs.com>by New Years Day.

Peace and Joy!

EHS

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# Arthur Carl Piepkorn

Colleagues,

Today another book review. Before I could stop, it got a bit long. Too much for a single ThTh post, I think. So part 2 comes next week. Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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**THE SACRED SCRIPTURES AND THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS.**

**SELECTED WRITINGS OF ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN,  
Ed. Philip J. Secker. Mansfield, Connecticut: CTC  
Press. 2007. Paper. \$21.95**

**[Order online from web address below]**

*Arthur Carl Piepkorn [ACP] (1907-73) was my teacher at Concordia Seminary (St. Louis, Missouri) in the early 1950s. Two decades later—but only for two brief years before his tragic death at age 66—I was his colleague in the department of*



systematic theology at the same place. The subject matter in both eras was the same: the theology of the Lutheran Confessions.

I say “tragic death” because though he had survived World War II as military chaplain, he died on the battlefield of the wars of Missouri. Some attending his funeral were even more crass: “The Missouri Synod killed him.” And that is not simply partisan hyperbole. Here’s how it’s plausible.

ACP was one of the superstars “given” to the LCMS in the 20th century. Others of similar stellar status from that era were Richard Caemmerer, Jaroslav Pelikan, Frederick Danker, Robert Bertram, Richard Luecke. ACP’s gifts shone through the many facets that had been polished on the gemstone that he was. Ph.D. at age 24—in Assyriology! Commandant at the U.S. Army Chaplain School. Pioneer in Lutheran liturgical renewal. Member of the group that organized the US Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue—and participant therein until his death—where even the Roman superstars admitted that ACP could out-quote them (from memory, in Latin) when RC documents from antiquity were needed for discussion.

Closer to home in Missouri, ACP was THE expert in the Lutheran Confessions (in their original languages, of course)—expert also in the subsequent generations of theologians, now designated Lutheran Orthodoxy (all of that in Latin or German too). At the seminary (and from other venues in the LCMS) when you needed to know whether something was “kosher” according to the Confessions, it was automatic, “Ask Arthur Carl.” [A mythology grew up, of course, about his omni-competence. Verified as true is this one. One of the four Piepkorn daughters comes home from parochial school and asks her mother (Miriam) to clarify something her teacher had said in class that day. Miriam: “I don’t know. Why don’t you ask your father

when he comes home?" Daughter:"Mama, I don't want to know that much!""]

ACP knew the Lutheran Confessions better than anybody in USA Lutheranism, chapter and verse—and lived their “doctrinal content” (his favored phrase) in palpable and conscious commitment. And therefrom comes the death-blow. The LCMS national convention in New Orleans in 1973 passed a resolution condemning Piepkorn as a false teacher. Others of us also fell under that verdict. This was the same LCMS whose constant drumbeat was to be the most orthodox Lutheran denomination in America, most faithful to the Lutheran Confessions. And the convention spoke its “damnamus” (the Latin word in the Luth. Conf. for “we condemn”) to their God-given expert in, and practitioner of, Lutheran confessional orthodoxy.

The text of that fateful resolution uses the very words of the Formula of Concord (the last major Lutheran confessional document of the 16th century) to speak its damnamus: “cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended.” For ACP these words were salt in the wounds, for they were using ACP’s own prose (literally) to condemn him. He had translated the Formula for the English-language edition of the Lutheran Confessions.

In the weeks that followed New Orleans, LCMS officials, carrying out the convention mandate, imposed “retirement” on ACP. He sought to challenge the action on constitutional grounds, but he died of a heart attack before he could argue his case—5 months and one day after the convention’s “damnamus” action. His funeral at Concordia Seminary was itself a piece of our post-New Orleans “time for confessing.” Besides the fifth-commandment verdict spoken at his funeral (“Missouri-killed-him”), I remember Walt Bouman’s comment (he too now of blessed memory) “We are also burying the Missouri Synod today.”

Poignant and memorable were the words of his widow, Miriam: "They thought they could retire him. God took care of that."

Did Shakespeare or Euripides ever compose a tragedy more grim? And Missouri today is afire with an "Ablaze!" campaign for world evangelism. Playing with fire—especially God's fire— is always dangerous. All the more so after you've immolated one of God's prophets.

Back to the book.

Editor Philip Secker was the last doctoral candidate to complete his degree under ACP before the Meister died. Phil has taken his last-of-the-line status as a calling, an Elijah's mantle, and has fashioned an impressive website, "The Arthur Carl Piepkorn Center for Evangelical Catholicity." <[www.lutheransonline.com/piepkorn](http://www.lutheransonline.com/piepkorn)> [That's where you can buy the book.] It's the supermarket for Piepkorniana—manifest already in the center's very title, for "evangelical catholicity" was ACP's favored term for what the Lutheran Reformation was really all about. More about this below.

THE SACRED SCRIPTURES AND THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS. SELECTED WRITINGS OF ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN is the first volume in Phil's efforts to make ACP's theology available to a wider public. But not the first one ever. An earlier volume of ACP's essays—THE CHURCH (1993)—appeared from the hands of other ACP fans, but efforts to continue that series failed—until Phil came along. So Phil calls this book volume 2 in the series and is currently working on two more: Vol. 3. MINISTRY, CHURCH AND SACRAMENTS and Vol. 4: WORSHIP AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

In this volume we have seven of ACP's essays on scriptural issues (from 1954-73) and nineteen on the Lutheran Confessions (1951-1972). Missouri Synod's turmoil during these decades moves like a spectre through many of the essays—both those

*about the Bible and those about the Lutheran Confessions.*

*ACP seeks to come to terms with Missouri's shibboleths about the "Sacred Scriptures" [he seldom used the word Bible]. Veterans of the Wars of Missouri know these terms well: inerrancy, infallability, verbal inspiration, scriptural authority. The modus operandi is classic Piepkorn. It goes like this: "Terms x or y or z have no basis in the Sacred Scriptures themselves, nor in the Lutheran Confessions. [And then will come line-after-line of documentation from every imaginable source—and sometimes even un-imaginable ones.] The same is true of such terms in the best of the 'orthodox' Lutheran authorities. They are unknown. So they have come into our evangelical catholicity from alien regions. Ergo . . . ."*

*Seasoned enough to know that such scholarly demolition would not convince every critic, ACP recites over and over again in these seven essays his positive counsel—and personal faith-conviction:*

*"We should first refuse to reply to loaded questions with 'yes' or 'no.' Next we should point out the inadequacy of [shibboleth term "x"]. Then we should patiently affirm everything that the Sacred Scriptures say about themselves and that the Lutheran symbols [=Lutheran confessions] say about them. Finally we should assert our conviction that the Sacred Scriptures have the Holy Spirit as their principal Author, that they are the Word of God in the language of historical human beings, and that they are true and dependable. In the meantime, we need to continue to explore reverently and prayerfully together the isagogical and hermeneutical problems and possibilities that these convictions about the Sacred Scriptures imply." (p45)*

*One tour-de-force essay in the first grouping is ACP's review*

of Robert Preus's major work on *THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE. A STUDY OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY LUTHERAN DOGMATICIANS*. Since the theologians of that era were his own bailiwick, ACP can commend Preus chapter-and-verse for highlighting "the soteriological purpose of the Sacred Scriptures" in these theologians, their non-Biblicist mode of articulating Biblical authority, along with "many other significant insights." But he also cannot refrain from noting the—ahem!—"excessive number of typographical errors, particularly in the footnote quotations of the Latin sources." Nevertheless, generous to a fault, ACP trusts that "these are all things that a second edition can set to right." [Veterans of the Wars of Missouri will note the irony of ACP's positive review of this major work of one who later helped engineer Missouri's "not to be tolerated" decree on ACP.]

#### *ACP and the Lutheran Confessions. His Third Way*

The second set of essays in this volume—19 of them—are about the Lutheran Confessions. As mentioned above, ACP was my Confessions teacher during my seminary years and from 1971 to his death in 1973 we were colleagues in the systematic theology department at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

During my student days I wasn't clever enough to divine ACP's distinctive "take" on the Lutheran "Symbols" (his favored term for these confessional documents) and thus I didn't appropriate it. Not until we were teaching colleagues in those brief last two years of his life did I come to clarity on this. By then my "angle" on the Lutheran Confessions had been shaped by other Lutheran teachers: Pelikan, Elert and Bertram. Bob Bertram was dept. chair of systematic theology when I arrived to teach at Concordia Seminary in 1971, and it was Bob who once in casual conversation used the term "canonical" for ACP's own approach to the confessions.

No one dared to say that ACP was “wrong” about the Lutheran Confessions. He was the one to whom you ran to ask “What do the Confessions say?” So what was ACP’s “canonical” confessionalism? I’ll try to explain that.

Back on September 6 (ThTh 482) I told you this:

There were actually 3 different positions within the Concordia Seminary systematics dept. (in the early 1970s), three different readings of the Lutheran Confessions. One way of describing them is to say “three different sets of lenses” for reading the Lutheran Confessions. **One.** Four of our colleagues used . . . the lenses of Lutheran orthodoxy (17th/18th century theologians—Missouri’s self-claimed heritage) to read the confessions. In simple terms: Biblical authority is the linchpin for Lutheran theology. Everything centers around what the Bible says.

**Two.** Four other colleagues used Luther’s own theology as the lenses for the confessions. In simple terms: running all theology through the law-and-gospel sieve is that linchpin. Everything centers on what the Gospel is.

**Three.** ACP practiced a third way—with a “pax (gentle, of course) on both your houses” to the rest of us in the department. He knew Lutheran orthodoxy inside out, but also knew its slippery slope away from the classic confessions. So he couldn’t go there. And, for giving Luther’s own law/promise hermeneutics any priority of place, ACP was always a little leery of Blessed Martin’s occasional rambunctiousness—also in theology. When in a department meeting chairman Bob Bertram would refer to the law-gospel distinction as “the Lutheran hermeneutic for Scripture,” ACP would sometimes whisper over to me—emphasizing the indefinite article—“A Lutheran hermeneutic.”

Piepkorn's third option was to read the confessions "canonically," as the doctrinal canon of what Lutheranism is. Whatever the confessions say, that is what Lutherans "believe, teach and confess." What they leave untouched cannot be "required" as Lutheran. Orthodox teaching on such untouched topics is to be mined from the patristic heritage insofar as it doesn't contradict what the confessions do indeed say. Thus the Mother of Jesus is "always virgin." The Lutheran confessions say so. For the business of "verbal inspiration and scriptural inerrancy," Missouri's banner on the ramparts, he said: "Not Lutheran. It's not in the confessions."

ACP's 19 essays here—many of which I'd never seen before—document his "canonical" hermeneutic on the LC. He even has a lengthy article (34 pp) on "Principals for a Hermeneutics of the Lutheran Symbols." But in this essay he never addresses the issue of the differing hermeneutics for reading the confessions.

Here are some pointers toward ACP's canonical reading:

## **DOCTRINE**

His definition for "doctrine," itself a super-neuralgic item in the LCMS then (and perhaps still now), was this:

"Doctrine is that which the Holy Spirit teaches through the Sacred Scriptures in the church so that human beings might know how they are to think of God, how God is minded toward them and what they need to believe and do for God's saving purpose for humanity and for them to be realized in and through them." (61)

What makes that sound "canonical" is first of all its implicit multiplicity (you can expect many things "to believe and do"),

*not simplicity (one-ness) AND, above all, its “you gotta” character—“How they are to think . . . what they need to believe and do.”*

*The Bertram-Bouman-Schroeder-Weyermann quartet [hereafter BBSW] in the systematics department preferred to say—and I remember Pelikan teaching us this in my first year as a seminary student—“according to the AC there is only one doctrine—the Latin word is in the singular—‘doctrina evangelii’ (AC 7), the one doctrine that IS the Gospel.” So why then are there 28 patently different articles (multiple doctrines?) in the AC? They are spokes coming from the Gospel hub at the center of the wheel. If a spoke doesn’t “fit” into that center, it is rejected. It’s not “gospel.” If it does fit, it stays. That is the rubric the AC follows from start to finish.*

*ACP didn’t deny the Gospel’s uniqueness, nor its centrality. In quintessential ACP rhetoric he says:*

*“The gospel is not one doctrinal datum in the sacred scriptures among many, but in the hierarchy of verities that the church has always taught [is that not canonic?] it is the crucial, decisive, and unique item: all the other items derive their ultimate significance from their relationship to it.” (293)*

*Or again:*

*“As the central exegetical criterion in the Sacred Scriptures is [now comes German] ‘was Christum treibet’ [=what promotes Christ]. . . so the central exegetical criterion of the Symbols is the article ‘that we can obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God not through our merit, works or satisfaction, but that we obtain forgiveness of sins and become righteous before God by grace for the sake of*



*Christ through faith . . . .’” AC IV. (108)“To be Lutheran means to see the church’s teaching in terms of the Gospel.” (195)*

*The BBSW bunch wanted to go one step further: Yes, the Gospel is indeed the central “doctrinal datum in the sacred scriptures.” It is, in fact, so central that in the Lutheran Confessions the Gospel itself becomes the “norm” for the Bible. And the Gospel, when “properly distinguished” from God’s law, its polar opposite, becomes the criterion for how to read that entire Bible that testifies to this one “doctrina evangelii.” But to call that THE Lutheran hermeneutic for reading the Bible? ACP didn’t think so.*

*[To be continued “Deo volente et nemine contradicente” (God willing and no one contradicting)—a favored ACP caution when he committed himself to some future task.]*

*Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder*

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## **“Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light” – A Book Review**

Colleagues,

This week’s Thursday Theologian is Pastor Stephen C. Krueger, Seminex grad, LCMS rostered pastor, now serving as hospice chaplain in Florida. Steve’s world of daily work is LifePath Hospice and Palliative Care, the largest not-for-profit

hospice program in the United States. LifePath Hospice currently serves over 2,000 patients in the area of Tampa. Steve was the first one I thought of as reviewer for the recent revelations of Mother Teresa's "dark night of the soul." Reason #1: Every one of his parishioners is face-to-face with the final "Good Night . . . the dying of the light." (Dylan Thomas). Reason #2: October a year ago Steve was our ThTheologian with a show-and-tell about his law/promise theology in praxis: "Hospice Reflections on John 11." He gave us a tour-de-force of cross/resurrection pastoral care, Christ's light shining into the darkness and—as St. John claims—"the darkness does not overcome it." After you read today's post—his appreciation of, and "conversation" with, Mother Teresa—you'll want to go back to that one again. It's at <https://crossings.org/thursday/2006/thur101906.shtml>

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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***A Review of MOTHER TERESA: COME BE MY LIGHT, ed. Brian Kolodiejchuck, M.C. (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 404 pp., \$22.95 US.***

*As historians assess the shapes of the latter half of the twentieth century, two shapers will certainly stand out. Ironically, both came out of the same orbit of Eastern European Roman Catholic Christianity and emerged on the world stage in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, and then the massive social changes which the Eastern European world knew as the Iron Curtain fell. Scholars will continue to have to debate why these two somewhat unlikely representatives of the post Vatican*

II church are the ones being considered for sainthood, but there can be little debate about the influence of Pope John Paul II and his contemporary, Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Both in their own ways captured the attention of an increasingly secularized west and, with the power of contemporary media, gained an enormous following.

Who can argue about the key role Pope John Paul II played to bring about the collapse of the Soviet Empire? And who again can dispute how a diminutive nun born in Macedonia who founded a religious order became, in the words of Javier Perez de Cuellar, the Secretary General of the United Nations, "the most powerful woman in the world"? Among the things which intrigue is how countercultural both appear to have been to the themes of modernity and post-modernism. Yet, the compelling power of both figures to critics and fans alike is virtually beyond dispute. It is almost as if we loved them because they were so profoundly different from us. And, in being different, they both (in ways strikingly parallel), revealed to us a better way.

Comes now, in the wake of noticing this possibility, a book about one of these two larger-than-life figures that equally endears her even more and yet disturbs, in ways we had not thought or, perhaps, were quite ready for. Edited by admirer, associate and biographer, Fr. Brian Kolodiejchuck, M.C., Ph.D., *MOTHER TERESA: COME BE MY LIGHT* is a fairly exhaustive and intimate portrayal of the saint of Calcutta, containing Mother Teresa's writings and thoughts as they evolved over her lifetime.

Fr. Kolodiejchuck is postulator of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and director of the Mother Teresa Center, so the account is hardly an adversarial one. Probably to his credit, the editor is

convinced that revealing Mother Teresa's deepest heart in her most intimate correspondence and writings will only all the more endear her to us. But there is a risk in accurate truth-telling, too. From the account we learn about "the darkness" which accompanied Mother Teresa throughout her life and, if anything, grew more intense over the years. If somehow we had thought that Mother Teresa was one of those rare souls who could lead us out of the night into the light of God, we are in for a rude awakening. No wonder the book (in the words of the salesperson who sold me my difficult-to-find copy) is "flying off the shelves." Mother Teresa had doubts, too, just as the rest of us.

Yet then again, and more deeply, that probably comes more nearly to the point, purpose and gift of the treasure of this volume. The book is written chronologically from the time eighteen-year-old Gonxha Agnes Bojaxhiu, the future Mother Teresa, left her home in Skopje in 1928 and joined the Loreto Sisters in Ireland to the time of her death in 1997 in India. It chronicles the journey with the known writings and letters of this unique missionary to the poorest of the poor.

The corpus is supplemented with historical commentary and interpretation by the editor and generously footnoted and indexed throughout. Just on the face of it alone, the book is masterfully crafted by an exacting historiographer. Yet throughout the volume the overriding "mission statement" is kept central as something of a mystery less to be solved and understood than it is to be thought about and savored as part of the spirituality of a true saint of God: "If I ever become a Saint-I will surely be one of 'darkness.' I will continually be absent from Heaven-to light the light of those in darkness of earth" (p. 1).

As we look into her heart through her writings (most of which

Mother Teresa begged to be destroyed but weren't) the darkness can get pretty dark. We watch how a young nun, immersed in her love for her Bridegroom, eager, naïve, passionate, hears her Spouse calling to her on a train in September of 1946:

"[It] was a call within my vocation. It was a second calling. It was a vocation to give up even Loreto where I was very happy and to go out in the streets to serve the poorest of the poor. It was in that train, I heard the call to give up all and follow Him into the slums-to serve Him in the poorest of the poor...I knew it was His will and that I had to follow Him. There was no doubt that it was going to be His work (p. 40)."

Thus, the Missionaries of Charity, the missionary order Mother Teresa ultimately founded, was born. She elsewhere said that the call to her was an invitation to quench the thirst of her Beloved as he said, "I thirst" from the cross:

"'I thirst,' Jesus said on the cross when Jesus was deprived of every consolation, dying in absolute Poverty, left alone, despised and broken in body and soul. He spoke of His thirst-not for water-but for love, for sacrifice. Jesus is God; therefore, His love, His thirst is infinite. Our aim is to quench this infinite thirst of a God made man... (p. 41)."

As Mother Teresa fought church authorities to legitimate her calling, her order and the needs of a small community of workers to minister to the poorest of the poor in India, her love affair with Jesus demanded more and more that she "bring joy to the suffering heart of Jesus" (p. 56). This insatiable longing by her Lord, Teresa found, rather than fulfill her and be the source of joy, instead, led her further and further into the darkness. Mother Teresa herself attributed the demand to a

series of visions from which a voice cried out to her "Come be my light" (pp. 101-102). Teresa finds, however, to be Christ's light to others costs, and the cost can be terrifying. It meant for her joining in solidarity with the Christ embodied most in the abandoned of all humanity...and not just abandoned by humankind...but by God.

Outwardly, as the mission unfolds, Teresa is perceived to be a single-minded tower of strength. Even her confessors, who hear about her increasing but quiet and private complaints about "the darkness within" and God's "abandonment and absence" attribute the isolation and loneliness to little more than the normal experience of those whose spirituality runs deep. But the darkness does not go away for Teresa. "Your Grace," she begins to write to Archbishop Perier in 1953, "...Please pray specially for me that I may not spoil His work and that Our Lord may show Himself-for there is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead. It has been like this more or less from the time I started 'the work.' Ask Our Lord to give me courage..." (p. 149).

As Teresa matures further in her own contemplation about all this, she apparently thinks deeply about the Christ-connected meaning of the darkness she continues to experience. "The physical situation of my poor left in the streets unwanted, unloved, unclaimed-are the true picture of my own spiritual life," she writes in 1962 (p. 232). With such words Teresa sees herself becoming ever more one with her Beloved, the Abandoned One of God. Thus, Mother Teresa by 1979 states to her attentive audience as she accepts the Nobel Peace prize:

"[Jesus] makes himself the hungry one, the naked one, the homeless one, the sick one, the one in prison, the lonely one, the unwanted one, and he says, "You did it to me." He is hungry for our love, and this is the hunger of our people.

*This is the hunger that you and I must find... (p. 291)."*

*That Teresa found that hunger in her oneness with her Lord, whose life was lived in solidarity with the poorest of the poor, begins to go to the core of her unfolding spirituality. And it was never satiated. Her biographer, Fr. Kolodiejchuck, wrote of her and Jesus, "Her heart was 'one' with His. His wounds were so imprinted on her soul that they had become hers. She suffered intensely at seeing the sufferings of those she loved, but she kept highlighting the value and the meaning of human suffering as a means of sharing in the Passion of Jesus" (p. 264). This observation probably says it all of Mother Teresa whose self-view of her own importance in God's economy of things was: "Only Jesus can stoop so low as to be in love with one such as me" (p. 268).*

*So now that we have the book, we discover that Mother Teresa was human after all, filled with "darkness" and feelings of "abandonment." But on the other hand, these were her experiences because she had given herself over to Jesus so completely that it was his darkness and abandonment that had filled her soul as she followed him in his divine solidarity with the poorest of the poor. Sainthood? She's got my vote, to be sure. But did she ever get God's vote of approval for sainthood? And make that vote her own by "simply" trusting it?*

*That's a question whose answer we probably will never know.*

*Toward the end of her life Mother Teresa wrote almost as a prayer:*

*"The joy of loving Jesus comes from the joy of sharing in His sufferings. So do not allow yourself to be troubled or distressed, but believe in the joy of the Resurrection. In all of our lives, as in the life of Jesus, the Resurrection*

*has to come, the joy of Easter has to dawn (p. 300)."*

*In the Christian rite for the Burial of the Dead, as Baptism is recalled, its promise is summoned by words just a little bit different but the difference is profound:*

*"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Romans 6: 3-5)."*

*As far as I can tell, the resurrection promise to Mother Teresa remained futuristic and informed very little of her working theology. However, as Moltmann and Pannenberg and a host of "hope thinkers" have since noticed, that same promise lays the grounding now for the Christian community to celebrate, even in its hardships and tears, the victory of the Lamb. Robert Bertram used to remind us how the promise authorizes even now the Christian life as a kind of glorious dress rehearsal for the grand banquet yet to be—a foretaste of the feast to come, as we sing in the liturgy. One wonders if such faith—Easter already now—might have better served to lighten the darkness of the woman of Calcutta whose world seemed so full of Good Friday alone.*

*In the writings of Teresa of Calcutta, one is struck by the deep parallels between them and some of Bonhoeffer's LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON. While struggling certainly with a different set of issues and concerns, both writers conclude that the baptismal vocation of Christians is (in Bonhoeffer's words) "to stand by God in the hour of His grieving," as God's*



*Son hangs on the cross for Christians and pagans “both alike forgiving” (from the poem “Christians and Pagans”). Yet one wonders whether Mother Teresa, from her Tridentine spirituality, ever let God forgive her, even as God does not forgive Jesus.*

*Then, more deeply, there is another question Mother Teresa’s book leaves us with. Does she ever forgive God for doing what God did to her Beloved (known through Jesus’ solidarity with the poorest of the suffering poor of the world)?*

*Perhaps if Mother Teresa had had a spiritual advisor/mentor as did young Martin Luther in his father-confessor Johann von Staupitz, more light might have shown in her own darkness. It was Staupitz who once told Luther: “Martin, it isn’t God who is angry with you. It is you who are angry with God.” Perhaps she, with C.S. Lewis, could have found delight and promise in noticing as Lewis did (as he grieved the death of his wife): “Sometimes it is hard not to say ‘God forgive God.’ Sometimes it is hard to say so much. But if our faith is true, He didn’t. He crucified Him.” (from A GRIEF OBSERVED). And, having said that, let God’s forgiveness of Mother Teresa reign in her own soul.*

*But then, again, who knows? If Mother Teresa had taken that promise—a promise true for everybody else—and made it true for herself by believing it, there might never have been a Mother Teresa, the driven saint of Calcutta who loved her Lord so much she took God’s unforgiveness of him as her own.*

*MOTHER TERESA: COME BE MY LIGHT gives the world the likely bone fide saint as she was. She would have smiled at Bonhoeffer’s famous opening to THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” She would, of course, have known that those dated words apply to women, too, as they*

*always have since the cross and the empty tomb. But what she struggles with in that dear discipleship of hers is whether Christ's death and resurrection were for her, too. The Son whom she loved with all her heart as her Beloved Jesus got damned for her, that she need not be. Only her Beloved knows if she ever made that promise her own by believing it, even as it now is most certainly fully hers.*

*Personally, I hope they declare her a saint for our sakes but not for hers. She doesn't need it. That promise had been true for her all along.*

*Pr. Steve Krueger  
Sun City Center, FL*

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# **Chaplain's Ministry for Luther's 524th birthday—and—the 232nd birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps!**

Colleagues,

U.S. military chaplain Lee Precup—LCMS pastor—passed this on to me for Ed's edification. It did its good deed for me, so now it comes to you as this week's posting two days before those overlapping birth-dates that triggered his reflections. You can see another slice of Chaplain Precup's pastoral work

on the DAYSTAR website. Here's the URL to get there:  
<<http://day-star.net/journal/2-4-precup.htm>> Topic "This War"Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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## ***A Bit of Martin***

*Margarete Luther gave birth to a son on 10 November 1483, and while she recovered, her husband, Hans, took the boy baby to church on 11 November to be baptized. Many believe that the child was named Martin because 11 November is the feast day of St. Martin of Tours.*

*Martin of Tours was a fourth century Roman cavalry officer, probably named Martin after the god of war, Mars. He had been exposed to Christianity, and one day encountered a wounded soldier. Martin immediately cut his cloak in two and gave half to the injured man. That night, according to legend, Christ appeared to Martin in a dream wearing half of that cloak. Martin left military service, was baptized, became a priest, and was later sainted. His cape (Latin, capella) was kept in a chapel (cloak room), and the keeper of the cape became a chaplain (interesting that some of God's servants would be coat room attendants). St. Martin of Tours became the patron saint of chaplains, and because he was a popular saint, even patron saint of some cities (Erfurt was one). His feast day also marked the beginning of a forty-day period of fasting during Advent.*

*Skip ahead a few centuries to the Continental Congress establishing a Navy 13 October 1775, a Marine Corps 10 November*

(!), and a Chaplain Corps 28 November in that same year. From the very beginning, leaders of the fledgling United States thought that military people should have access to worship and spiritual formation. Their reasoning might not always have been for the sake of piety, however: "If fear is cultivated it will become stronger; if faith is cultivated it will achieve mastery." – John Paul Jones. Chaplains were responsible for worship and teaching elementary skills such as reading and writing to enlisted people who did not have much opportunity for a formal education. Whether or not Lutheran pastor Peter Muhlenberg actually took off his robes in the pulpit one Sunday to reveal a Continental uniform thus declaring his intention of fighting the British, is a matter of folklore. The reverse did occur, however, in that clergy followed the troops either as formally-appointed chaplains or as itinerant preachers to aid in the revolution. In 1862, Rev. Friedrich W. Richmann served in the 58th Regiment of the Ohio Volunteers in the Civil War, and became the first LCMS military chaplain.

Parish pastors are called to serve a worshipping community. Chaplains are called to live in a community—a community of Christians, non-Christians, and people of other religions. This diverse cross section of America holds strong beliefs for or against religion, or has no opinion whatsoever. Chaplains are staff officers. That is to say, they command and lead no one, but are staff officers of a Commanding Officer to whom they are responsible. They advise in matters of religion, ethics, and morale. What does a Commanding Officer expect of a chaplain? For the most part, chaplains assist in accomplishing the military mission by being a counselor resource for the people assigned to the command. The US Army spells out the work of a chaplain thus: to encourage the living, to comfort the wounded, and to honor the dead. Some Commanding Officers will relegate the chaplain to the status of an ordained social worker, and

others will gladly support all expressions of religious ministry. Some want their chaplain far away from any decision making; others want their chaplain at the very center of any important activity. After weeks at sea, a sailor may say to a chaplain, "I don't know how much longer I can take this," and the chaplain may honestly answer, "I know; I know."

At 2155 (that's 9:55 pm for all you civilians) on each Navy ship at sea, there is evening prayer before taps (lights out). It is piped throughout the ship by loudspeaker. The chaplain prays into a microphone on the darkened bridge (the place where the ship is steered). Spending time on the bridge\*- to get my night vision before evening prayer, and afterwards visiting the watch standers there as the ship steams through the night, I have learned how to be a good lookout. The way to see anything in the dark is not to look at it directly, but to keep scanning the horizon so that you can catch a glimpse of anything around you out of the corner of your eye. That is not a bad analogy of the Christian faith. We cannot look into the empty grave, nor point anywhere and say: "Look, here is the proof of our faith. I can clearly see Jesus here." We only catch oblique glimpses of the Savior at work in us and among us-sometimes only in hindsight. I now intend to share some oblique sightings with you from a chaplain's perspective.

The average age in the military is 22. There are a lot of very young, junior people who make up the bulk of the military. Some of these young men and women are somewhat confused about life in general, and have little or no motivation for being in the military other than it seemed like a good idea. Larger Navy ships continue to have brigs (jails), and a punishment for any sailor who refuses to go to his appointed place of duty, or who refuses to work may be awarded three days in the brig on rations of bread and water. That sailor has to be visited daily by a medical officer, a representative of the command, and the

chaplain. On one occasion, I made my way down into the bowels of the ship where the brig is located, and was let into the locked, barred area adjacent to the cell where the sailor sat on the deck. There is nothing in the 8 foot by 8 foot cell (he sleeps and has sanitary facilities in a different area) except the steel deck. A ship at sea makes its own electricity, and for various reasons, sometimes it fails, which it did on this occasion. Did I mention that the sliding door of bars I entered is electrically operated?

Being locked in with a prisoner was something new for me, but we began to talk. I asked what he was learning in that place. His response was not much of anything. I asked if he thought he deserved to be where he was. His response was that he certainly did not want to be there, nor in the Navy. I asked what he expected to get out of the Navy. He did not know. I asked what he expected out of life. Again, he did not know. In frustration, I asked what he was putting into his life. He sat in angry silence for a while. I then asked if he would like to know Someone who can make life worthwhile. He was intrigued by the idea of God being even where we were, but then became sad to the point of tears. I asked where that was coming from, and he explained all of the mistakes of his young life and how God would not want anything to do with the likes of him. I smiled and named that Someone who came to save lost sinners. The end of this story is yet to be written.

On another occasion, I knew that an officer on one of my squadron ships was looking forward to the birth of his first child. His wife went into labor on Christmas Eve, and delivered a boy on Christmas Day. A few weeks later, we were at sea for local training. That officer was present for worship, and the Sunday happened to be the Presentation of our Lord. The Gospel for the day speaks of the presentation, Simeon, and Anna, but the last verse intrigued me: The child grew and became strong,

*filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him (Luke 2:40). With the father's permission, I played off the growth of the officer's child and the growth of Our Child, of how one child had found favor with God through baptism, and the other Child found favor with God because he humbled Himself to become a Child. We returned to port that Monday, and on Friday I was summoned to a hospital late at night. The child had died. You may have heard stories of military bravery, but they pale in comparison to what I witnessed that night. Father, mother, and I prayed together as she held her dead baby. The death of a well baby necessitated a coroner's inquest. It was only the brave faith that the child was in Jesus' care that allowed that mother to get up from her chair and hand her dead child over to the coroner. I chose the same Luke text for the memorial service. What wisdom does a forty-day-old child have? In this case, the child knew the warmth and love of mother, the joy and love when father held him, and through the grace of baptism will know God's eternal, loving embrace.*

*At another time of worship, it was Holy Week, and we had concluded Maundy Thursday worship with the Lord's Supper. There were only five of us, but we dined well. It was a special meal just for us. One person remained, and we sat in silence for a while. In the low lighting, he finally spoke, "You know, this is exactly how I imagine the Garden of Gethsemane." Did I mention that we were in the wardroom of a submarine at minus 400 feet and this was the Captain? Well, he had a point. Reflecting on the night in which the Savior was betrayed is to see with faith, and not with eyes which would see only the cramped spaces of a submarine. I told the Captain that I was glad to be there with him to experience Gethsemane, and to celebrate forgiveness through the sharing of Jesus' very body and blood.*

*I could tell more dramatic stories, but daily life tends to be*

more mundane. Even there, however, it is the shared moments with sailors and Marines (navy chaplains serve both) that have kept me eager to serve. Whatever their faith background, when I overhear a sailor or Marine talking about "my chaplain" when referring to me, I walk a little taller because I know that I have become God's representative for them. I am that daily reminder that God is present for them, and they know that I will gladly speak to them about anything, but especially about what God is doing and what God has accomplished in Christ. I have also been amazed at times of their care for me. They have graced me with offering all that they have-a Marine offering to share some fruit in the field where any fresh food is a treasure, a sailor offering to help stow my gear on a ship when he has already worked a long day, a Commanding Officer who unburdens himself regarding the responsibility of the actions and inactions of every person on his ship. This is the mission field in which I work.

Now, what of the present conflict in which we are engaged? I have not been there. The luck of the draw with assignments, or a realization of my age, or whatever else has determined my present military orders. I have not been to the Middle East in years. Some in the military like me carry a bit of guilt about that. Have we let down our brothers and sisters in some way? Intellectually, I know that is not the case, but it is a nagging feeling at times. I do listen to those who have been there. I especially listen when they begin to reveal incredible tales of actions which eye was not designed to see, nor ear to hear. I do not know what they experienced then, but I assure them that what they feel now is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. I also assure them that God sorrows with them over this warring world, and more, God has done something about it. Jesus paid the price for all of our wrongs, and he chooses to forgive us. We do have a Savior, and all of this



will pass away.

My current duty station is at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego. Here, eighteen-year-old recruits are made into Marines after three months of extremely difficult training. Almost daily, I counsel with recruits over homesickness, the correctness of their decision, problems at home, and doubts of completing this training. My vision is a bit more long range than theirs. I tell them that my daily prayer is that this war will end. I also tell them that if they joined to fight, and if when it is their turn to go, there is no war, they may blame me, and thank God.

My days in the military are fast coming to a close, and I must retire due to age. In conflict and in times of peace, I thank God for the people I have encountered and for whom I have sometimes made connections with the Savior, they with me, and God's own Son with us both. On one level, I regret that some of the brightest people of our country devote their lives to the study and prosecution of war. When they join me, however, in praying the Lord's Prayer, specifically, "Thy kingdom come..." they confess with me that God's plan is complete. The Savior has come. His kindly rule and gift of life may be seen only partially now, but all of this, including war, will pass away at Jesus' return. We trust his promise that he is making all things, including us, new.

Some went down to the sea in ships, plying their trade in deep waters. They beheld the works of the Lord, God's wonderful works in the deep. Psalm 107:23

Chaplain J. L. Precup  
United States Navy

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# Luther as Mission Theologian –

## 9.5 Theses

Colleagues,

This past Monday October 31, the designated day for Reformation Remembrance, a group of Lutheran pastors in the neighborhood—both LCMS and ELCA—asked me speak (for only 20 minutes!) at their lunch gathering. The topic was “Luther as Mission Theologian.” I concocted nine-point-five theses for the occasion, here passed on to you with a bit of comment. Longtime receivers of ThTh postings will recognize some stuff you’ve read here before. Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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### ***Preface: Luther’s Reformation Aha!***

- 1. Luther’s 95 theses #1 signals his mission theology: “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said ‘Repent’ (Matt. 4:17), He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence.” “Mission field” is not a geographical term, but a cardiological one. The “field” is the human heart. The change signalled in the word “repent” is a change (ala Luther) in “what one’s heart is hanging onto.” Either in fear, or in love, or in trust—or some combination of all three “verbs of the heart.” WHAT your heart is hanging on was thereby Luther’s definition for a*

deity. And the question then was “which god?” True god or false god? Mission and repentance in Christian vocabulary signal changes in the de facto deity (and their name is legion) at the heart of the matter.

2. The goal of mission, what Jesus is calling for in Matt. 4, is expressed by St. Paul in the 2nd lectionary lesson for two weeks ago (Oct. 16) as he reviews the mission history of the Thessalonian congregation: “how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God and ... his Son ... Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.” I Thess. 1:1-10. The goal of Christian mission is finally to have people change gods, to switch where their heart is hanging. That can also be true of folks who call themselves Christian. They too may—better said, regularly do—need a god-change. It all depends on what their hearts are REALLY hanging onto. If repentance is to be a daily event, then daily god-change is also in the mix—not primarily in the head, but in the heart where fears, loves, and trusts transpire. Here is where “true” fear, love, trust is constantly conflicted by “other gospels” knocking on the door.
3. At the end of his explanation to the Apostles Creed in the Large Catechism Luther says: “These articles of the Creed, therefore, divide and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside the Christian church [ausser der Christenheit], 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. 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.” Taking his cue from Romans 1 and Acts 17 Luther

clarifies what he understands about the switch that repentance/mission entails. He understands that God-encounters, yes, encounters with the one and only God there is, happen to everyone throughout history, and that "believing" and "worshiping" response regularly ensues. However, folks never perceive "from nature" the attitude of the "one true God" to be merciful to sinners. The universal drive throughout world religions to rectify things with the deity by sacrifices corroborates that this is not known. Even to his fellow God-believing Jews Jesus has to say: God "desires mercy, not sacrifice." That is: "I, God, desire to be merciful to you, rather than you sacrificing to me" in order to patch things up between us.

What "heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites" are missing, even with their theisms, is that "they do not have the Lord Christ." Note the word "have." It's a possession thing. And when you don't have Christ (who is "had" by trusting him) you lack being "confident of God's love and blessing. . .[and] are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit." You do, sadly, continue to "have" something else: "They remain in eternal wrath and damnation." To modern ears that sounds way too harsh. Definitely not nice. Yet it is no harsher than Paul's words to the Thessalonians above who now "have" Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming."

4. The kind of salvation offered in the Christian Gospel is different from the salvation offered by other gospels. As S. Mark Heim has shown, differing world religions offer different salvations. "Going to heaven" is not a universal salvation offer. In fact, going to heaven is more central to the salvation offered in Islam, than the

salvation offered in the Christian gospel. Buddhist Nirvana and the Kingdom of God offered by Christ do not overlap at all. And the Good news of the crucified Messiah is not focused on going to heaven either. It offers survival from divine criticism, that God's last word for Christ-trusters is (and will forever be) mercy. And who knows what those "mansions" really look like? New Testament writers tell us very little. Might well be that they weren't all that interested. Already having God's last word about their upbeat futures, the architecture of eternity was no big deal.

5. God operates a "double mission" in the world, not just "one" *Missio Dei* as now permeates ecumenical mission theology--also in the LCMS and the ELCA. Luther's thesis #62, "The true treasure of the church is the most holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God," designates the the Christic one of these two missions. But God's other "mission" in Moses still persists for those not yet covered by Christ's mission. If you think they are mostly the same--as *Missio Dei* theology tends to do--then read 2. Corinthians 3:4ff. Here Paul talks about God's old covenant and new covenant, God's old ministry and new ministry, God's two missions to the same mission field, "the tablet of human hearts," One mission kills, one makes alive. St. Paul's own Christian mission, so he claims, celebrates God's "regime change" with sinners. It is the move, first of all on God's part, from Moses to Christ, from a mission of condemnation to a mission of justification, from a lethal (though fading) glory to a permanent glory that outshines the other one to the nth degree. Christian mission aims to move people out from under lethal glory into "the glory and grace of God, that treasure of the most holy Gospel."
6. One of Luther's favored images for mission is the Gospel

coming into new territory as a “Platzregen,” a thundershower, a cloudburst. That can be both good news and bad. God sends the Gospel shower as a surprise, not expected, but much needed. That’s good news. But if nothing grows in the soil where this rain falls, or if later the Gospel’s nurture is ignored or spurned, God moves the Platzregen somewhere else. Then a “famine of the Word of God” (the grim word of the prophet Amos) moves in and parched earth is all that’s left. Bad news indeed. Does this shed light on the apparent “move” of the Christian Gospel to the earth’s southern hemisphere away from the churchly north where it has been moistening for two millennia?

7. If you’re baptized, you’re a missionary. That’s the self-understood mission theology of Christians in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church – Mekane Yesus. According to the Lutheran World Federation the EECMY is the fastest growing Lutheran church in the world today. In a recent survey of new members only 8% became Christ-followers through contact with a pastor. The rest heard the Good News over the backyard fence from their neighbors. “Everybody knows” that if you’re baptized you’re a missionary. The key verb is “offer.” Anyone who has received the offer can make the offer.
8. Reformation Day’s three lectionary texts spell out a sequence: Central terms—Forgiveness (God’s NEW offer in Jeremiah 31), Faith in that offer (Romans 3), Freedom the result (John 8). Christ’s forgiveness is offered (with reference, if need be, to previous offers where people’s hearts have been hanging). Recipients are “encouraged” to shift their faith to the forgiveness offered. The upshot is freedom, freedom from the slavery (as Jesus tells his Jewish hearers) that their prior heart-hanging had not remedied. The freedom in Christ’s offer is “total

freedom," whatever that all means. One might say that John's entire Gospel spells out the specs.

9. USA is as much a mission field as was the Holy Roman Empire of Luther's day, where everybody (except Jews) was baptized. But where hearts were hanging in his day was another matter. And the penance/indulgences gospel of the day was an "other" Gospel. Hearts needed to switch to the church's true treasure. That's mission. Today's alternate gospels—churchly & secular—are legion. That is as true in the USA today as anywhere else in the world. These alternate gospels are being feared, loved and trusted all over the place. Also among folks who want to be Christians. Hearts need to switch lest God's Mosaic mission have the last word.

9.5. The theology of mission is the theology of the cross. The final 4 theses of the 95.

#92. "Away, then with those prophets [the indulgence hustlers in ML's day, the false gospellers—churchly & secular—in our day] who say to Christ's people, 'Peace, peace,' where there is no peace." #93. "Hail, hail to all those prophets who say to Christ's people, 'The cross, the cross,' where [in the plethora of other gospels] there is no cross."

#94. "Christians should be exhorted to be zealous to follow Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hells;"

#95. "And let them thus be more *conFIDEnt* [note the word "fide," faith, in this term, also in Luther's Latin] of entering heaven through many tribulations rather than through a false assurance [*securitas*] of peace."

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# DOES CHRISTIAN MISSION DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

Colleagues,

When Marie and I set out on our last ELCA Global Mission Volunteer adventure (2004), we stopped over in Hong Kong for a spell before heading to our workplace in Singapore. We visited the Lutheran Theological Seminary there atop Tao Fong Shan [tao=way/word; fong=wind/spirit; shan=mountain. So, in its Christian meaning: Mountain of the Word and the Spirit] beyond the Seven-Dragon-Mountain that borders “downtown” Hong Kong. There we met Jochen Teuffel, youngish theology prof. He’d come to TFS in 2002 from the Bavarian Lutheran Church in Germany to teach systematic theology. Since then, thanks to cyberspace, our conversation has continued. Last month Jochen published an article “back home” in the Sueddeutsche Zeitung [South German Newspaper, a major paper read throughout Germany, not just in the south]. This article was too good to keep from folks who know only English. Jochen and I collaborated on a translation. Here it is. Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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***I AM A MISSIONARY. DOES CHRISTIAN MISSION DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD?***

***By Jochen Teuffel***

*Granted, I’m a missionary. Back in the 19th century missionary*



was an honorable calling. Missionaries going overseas enjoyed widespread respect in German society. Au contraire, today being a Christian missionary exposes one to criticism. Winning other peoples for the Christian faith is often seen as destructive of a people's own culture. The German heart is moved by calls for help in time of catastrophes, but for the salvation agenda, "everybody knows" that people work out their salvation in their own way. No outside help—even worse, interference—needed or desired.

Being a missionary today in Hong Kong does not put me in the front ranks. Young Chinese Christians telling their circle of friends about their own conversions are much more convincing than attempts by those of us who were cradle-Christians. Consequently my work at a theological seminary consists primarily in teaching theology students from Southeast Asia the grammar of Christian theology. Today's missionary isn't missionizing any longer. Instead we serve an indigenous partner church in its own efforts to promote the Christian faith.

If you confront Hong Kong Christians with German-style critique of mission work, they will shake their heads. Why not promote the message that you have experienced as healing for yourself? So it is no surprise that among Christians in Hong Kong there is a strong impulse for Mission. Congregation members use their holidays to make mission trips to China; various churches send missionaries to other countries. In doing so they are following a widespread trend. If mission in earlier years was the work of Europeans and North Americans, mission activity today—already since the mid 20th-century—has become the agenda of churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Nowadays Germans, weaned away from church life in secularized Europe, can hardly imagine that Christianity on other continents is "hot." It is received in these places as a

resource, not only for coping in one's own life, but also for improving it. The grounds for this is a dimension of reality that is fundamental for non-European cultures. Beyond the visible world that is susceptible to scientific analysis, there is the sphere of the intangible, highly influential, powers and spirits. They operate organically and symbiotically in human life with either positive or negative consequences. So keeping good relations with them by proper actions and behavior is crucial.

It is this organic symbiosis of daily life that is the Petri-dish-culture from which conversion to Christian faith arises in Asia. The Christian Gospel comes across as an effective teaching for spiritual well-being, "dietetics" in the Greek classical sense of a healthy way of life. That Gospel offers rescue from personally-known guilt, and then access to God's own superior power, his protection, his healing, his blessing. Finally these Christians often find themselves empowered by the Holy Spirit and hear God's call to a new way of life in the world—and to live that life in confidence.

### **Life, Translation, Formation**

There is more here than just finding meaning in life and coping with contingency. Christian faith proves to be a resource for living, not an imposed "you gotta." People come to Christ because it fits the realities of their life. Biblical patterns of daily life are much closer to the daily-life situations of Africa and Asia than they are to post-industrial Europe. Therefore a simple linguistic translation of the Gospel without extensive hermeneutical efforts suffices. If then people you know verify these truths of salvation, making the move yourself is not too difficult. Conversely, when someone you know becomes a Christian, it confirms your own Christian commitment. So Christians are motivated to speak of their own experience in

winsome ways to those who are not yet believers.

It is significant that Christian Mission in Southeast Asia was especially successful among minority peoples, for example, the Chins in Burma, the Montagnards in Vietnam. In some cases mission was carried out against the policy of the European colonial administrators—e.g., among the Nagas in Northeast India, where over 90% of the population today are Baptist Christians. When ex-Monty Python Michael Palin, doing a BBC TV series on the Himalayas, asked his native translator why the Konyaks (a Naga tribe once headhunters), why they became Christians, he received a quick short answer: because of education.

It is a fact that Christian mission has been a major agent for education. The school systems in many countries take their origin from earlier mission schools. In contrast to the Koran, the Bible from the very beginning was translated into local languages. Protestant missions were emphatic about making the Bible available in local languages, and thereby created written languages in many cultures that were previously non-literate. God was speaking in people's own mother-tongue. To encounter God's word for your own life, you must be able to read the Bible in your own language. In tribal cultures the incentive is strong to learn one's own written language. The next step then is to use that skill in creating a written record of one's own culture. The significance of Bible translations for preserving the heritage of tribal cultures cannot be overestimated.

### **Neo-heathen paternalism**

Tribal societies today are under constant pressure to assimilate—pressure from colonization, nation-state territorialism or economic globalization. Where traditional gods and spirits are unable to ward off this pressure, a power

*vacuum arises that can easily lead to culture-destroying fatalism. Christian doctrine embedded in one's mother tongue brings with it the support of God's own power for coping with the dilemma. With that sort of backing modern influences from the outside can be appropriated while still preserving one's own cultural identity.*

*Thus contrary to the current (western) prejudice that Christian mission destroys local cultures, the opposite is true. It is precisely such indigenized Christian teaching that protects the identity of tribal minorities from the onslaughts of assimilation by dominant "state-majority" ethnic groups, such as the Barma in Burma. Without one's own people-state tribal societies are exiled from the community of nations – but not from the world-wide ecumenical church. This global network of partner churches becomes a protective shield and a resource for creativity, items otherwise denied to them in their own country.*

*When Europeans reject Christian mission, they are ignoring their own tribal history. European civilization owes its existence to the fact that Christian mission among Teutonic tribal societies more than a thousand years ago was successful. Without the Christian church on European soil, European literacy and its appropriation of classical culture can hardly be imagined.*

*Why not grant this option to other cultures today? If today mission is largely the work of local national Christians, the suspicion of paternalism is actually reversed. Europeans who demonize Christian missions are projecting their own neo-heathen conditions onto other cultures. "What we no longer think has any significance for us, can surely not be any good for you either." So it is not mission, but its rejection that is a Euro-centric attempt to paternalize other peoples.*

*The claim that we only want to protect other “authentic” cultures signals a NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC-naturalism or romanticism that denigrates other peoples and their own aspirations. The claim to be preserving cultural authenticity reduces such people to exotic candidates for NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC reports, objects for ethnological research or tourist attractions. This attitude is but one step away from a racist distortion whereby such primitive “nature-peoples,” along with wild animals, are supposedly protected in their alleged “natural environment.”*

*Exactly opposite is Christian mission with its rejection of any form of racism, since all people are addressed—irrespective of race or gender—as having equal status, either as death-destined sinners who are NOT hopelessly lost, or as sisters and brothers in the Lord. Missionaries do not claim any superiority over others, but offer to others what they themselves have encountered as healing for their lives. When other people appropriate the Christian message for themselves, a community of mutual responsibility is created, and, yes, that frequently results in inner tensions. Exotic “nature-people” can always be kept at a distance. Not, however, fellow humans of whom Jesus said in his Judgment Day parable [Matthew 25] “Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”*

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