

# A Mission Sermon

Colleagues,

After over a decade of Mission Volunteer tours of duty for the ELCA, Marie and I now and then get invited for Sunday mission events in area congregations. That happened on October 7 and 14 this month, first at Peace Lutheran Church in Washington, Missouri, where Robin Morgan is pastor, and the next Sunday at two congregations (St. John's and Peace Lutheran) in southern Illinois.

The usual routine is that I deliver the Sunday homily and Marie does show-and-tell with digital photos from our mission gigs. [I won't tell you who gets the better ratings.] Here's the homily from October 7.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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The Revised Common Lectionary texts were:

HABBAKUK 1:1-4; 2:1-4. Key: "The righteous shall live by FAITH."

II TIMOTHY 1:1-14. Key: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the PROMISE of life that is in Christ Jesus."

## **LUKE 17:1-10. Three Missions Impossible**

Today is Mission Sunday at Peace Lutheran Church here in Washington, MO. It's Mission Festival, in old Lutheran language. But from the Gospel just read (Luke 17:1-10) it sounds like . . .

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE.

Did you hear those three impossible missions Jesus gives his disciples?

#### FIRST ONE.

Forgiveness 7 times in one day for the same “BROTHER” who sins against you. [English translation fudges a bit. There is no MUST in the Greek text, it’s just “You forgive him.” Natch. No sweat. You just do it—even without a must.].

Mission impossible.

So the apostles tell Jesus “Increase our faith,” for we can’t do that.

#### SECOND ONE

Then comes a second mission impossible. “If you just had a smidgin of faith—just a tiny bit—you could order that big walnut tree shading the parking lot to jump into the Missouri River and it would do it.

Mission impossible.

#### THEN COMES #3.

You’ve been slaving away all day for the boss. You come home pooped and then the boss says: “Hey, there’s lots more stuff for you to do, this and this and this....” And you don’t get thanked for it either. Just doing what you ought to do still leaves you a “worthless slave.” How to be a happy camper when you get treated like that?

Mission impossible.

And now, since this is Mission (Festival) Sunday, I’ve got one more.

#### NUMBER FOUR

How many of you are baptized? Hands up. Ok, here’s the zinger: “If you are baptized, YOU are a missionary.”

Who me? Me a Missionary? Impossible!

But you've heard it before, I bet. Even from Jesus himself. E.g., on the Sunday after Easter it was: "As the Father sent me, so I send you." The word MISSION, as you may know, comes from the Latin word for SEND. As the Father sent Jesus on a mission, so Jesus sends his folks on a mission too. If you're baptized you're connected to Jesus. He is God's missionary to us. He sends us out on the same mission. If you're Christ-connected, you're a missionary.

Gulp!

OK, let's take this foursome again from the top.

For if we could get those first three Mission Impossible's turned around, the last one might not be so impossible.

And to do that I'm going to pull out two key terms from the other two readings this a.m.

- From 2 Tim: The PROMISE of life that is in Christ Jesus.
- From Habakkuk: The righteous shall live by FAITH.

Here's the mantra:

Everybody lives by faith, faith in something. By trusting something or someone. Something, someone, that has PROMISE. So the real question is not: Do you have faith? Everybody does. But the question is Faith in WHAT promise? Faith in WHOSE promise? Discussing different faiths always winds up in discussing different PROMISES. Which PROMISE finally holds up, and which ones don't?

There are three key words in the first three impossibles things that Jesus says. They all start with F.

- Forgiveness (for the multi-sinful brother),

- Faith (for tree-removal), and
- Freedom (for working hard, but NOT as a slave).

First let's take them in the negative, which is what Jesus is doing in this text from Luke. It's Diagnosis—putting us under the X-ray. What the X-ray shows is: UNforgiveness, UNfaith, UNfreedom—for they are all one ball of wax. All linked to trusting the wrong promise. Unforgiveness grows out of UNfaith that grows out of UNfreedom. And the deep root of that UNfreedom is disconnect from God's own forgiveness promise. Unforgiven sinners show all three symptoms.

### Diagnosis

#1, Not trusting forgiveness, but trusting that—when forgiveness fails—retribution will work for me.

#2, Trusting the strength of my faith—and not God's promise that Christ offers.

#3, Trusting that I really am a slave—and acting that way in everything I do. Never trusting that I'm one of God's "free" kids, freed by Jesus telling me "You'll be glad to hear this: Your sins are forgiven." [Matthew 9:2]

Now how do you get those un-words un-done? I've already said it: Jesus telling us "You'll be glad to hear this: Your sins are forgiven."

With this same Jesus comes the positive side of those F-words.

### Prognosis:

#4, He is God's FORGIVENESS for folks like us. His forgiveness is a promise. Promises are spoken in the present tense, but they have a future payoff. The present tense is that God is now on our side, no longer "counting trespasses." The future tense is

that there will be a payoff. We will survive judgment day!

And, of course, it costs him his own life to be able to say to us: "You'll be glad to hear this: Your sins are forgiven." But he does it and says: "Here, it's all for you." That's Jesus the missionary: "Here's God's promise. It's for you. Trust it."

#5, That offer is what faith trusts. The mere offer invites us to trust it. Faith is nothing more than trusting that promise. Faith is not believing as hard as you can. It comes by first hearing Christ's promise as the Good News that it really is, and then hanging on to it, trusting Christ's forgiveness promise—from here to eternity.

#6, Which leads to FREEDOM. To living your life no longer as a slave—to anybody. First of all not in any slave-relationship with God, but as God's beloved kids. Nor slave to any other person (spouse, family member, boss, whoever), nor slave to the American way of life (which is really a way of death, according to Christ), nor slave to any ideology, or personal life plan, or whatever.

And that finally also means FREE to be a Missionary. As God sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us folks with our freedom, faith, forgiveness.

But where's the mission field? you ask. It's any place where folks are trusting other promises, and not trusting Christ's promise.

Where are such places? They are everywhere. First of all right here in church—and don't think first about someone in your pew. Think about yourself. Think about this preacher. All of us came to church this morning being bombarded by all sorts of other promises all week long. From people close to us—and from people farther away who have been getting their messages, their

promises to us. Just think of advertising, if nothing else. Or the promises at the workplace, or from our political leaders. You don't have to go to Asia or Africa. Washington MO is a mission field.

Remember the specs:

Wherever people are trusting other promises—that's a mission field. If you are baptized (Christ-connected) you are a missionary. HE said so.

And every day Christ sends you and me to these mission fields—where folks trust other promises. Yes, "other" promises get to us too—and we trust them. But we also know something about the Christ-promise. And Sunday worship is where we come—again and again—to get refocused on the REAL promise—get fueled up on the 3 F's—FORGIVENESS, FAITH, FREEDOM—to go back to our "normal" life in all these other mission fields, workplace, school, backyard fence, wherever.

If it seemed that pitching trees into the Missouri River BY FAITH was an impossible demand, think of the "uprooting" that happens when a person stops trusting the phony promises that bombard us every day and starts trusting "the PROMISE of life that is in Christ Jesus." Better yet: We Christ-trusters might think of our own uprooting, day in, day out. What it takes to get ourselves unplugged from the phony promises bombarding us, and keep us plugged in to "the PROMISE of life that is in Christ Jesus." We too say: "Lord, increase our faith." But the focus is NOT on how "strong" our faith is, but how "strong" is "the PROMISE of life that is in Christ Jesus." The strength of faith comes from the promise being trusted. Even better said: the strength of faith comes from the trustworthiness of the promissor.

Is Christ trustworthy? Anyone who dies in your place has got to

be.

Trusting this promissor makes you a missionary. Luther called it being a “Christ-pusher.” Hustling Christ’s promise on assignment from him, just as he “hustled” the Promise from his father to us. “As the Father sent me, so I send you.”

And the assignment is really rather simple. Christ doesn’t tell us to convert anybody. All we are sent to do is to offer Christ’s promise, and invite folks to trust HIS promise instead of the many other ones they are already trusting. And the mission field is with folks you already know. Folks you know because they already are living in your own home, your neighbors next door, the people you work with, your school mates, your drinking buddies. Because you already know these folks, and in some cases know them very well, you’ll already know something about the “other” promises they are trusting.

In friendly fashion tell them about THE promise you trust—or at least want to trust—and help them put that one alongside the other ones they are currently trusting. Since you and I know about these OTHER promises, because they grab us too, you won’t come off sounding “holier than thou,” but as a friend who has found a “treasure” and wants to tell other friends about it so that they can have that treasure too. You tell them that you too know what false promises are. And here you’ve found one that rings true. It’s not pie in the sky. It’s good stuff (Good News) for nitty-gritty daily life: the three F’s – FORGIVENESS. When your own engine is running on Christ’s forgiveness of you, you too—wild as it sounds—can indeed forgive fellow-sinners 24/7. Even seven times in one day! And you can talk forgiveness-promise stuff to folks floundering in the deadend rat-race of unforgiveness. FAITH. Trusting Christ’s promise and commending that promise to folks imprisoned by other promises. For with it all comes FREEDOM. First of all freedom to even dare to be a

missionary. To get out from under the slavery that “I can’t do it.” But, of course, we can. For if we are God’s kids, we can tell people what we know about our Abba and our Big Brother. Freedom is not a dirty word in our culture. It pops up all over in public conversation. When you or the neighbor brings up that term—just push the envelope to the “really good stuff.”

One of the bad effects of centuries of thinking that we Westerners live in a “Christian” civilization is that when we hear the word “missionary,” we immediately pull up pictures of something “overseas.” But the mission field is anyplace where folks are hooked on other promises. So that means you and I live right in the middle of a mission field—without getting on a jet and flying someplace.

Yesterday afternoon Marie and I attended the dedicatory service of (I think the first) Chinese Lutheran congregation in St. Louis. Everything was in Mandarin and English—two hour service. One of the choir members, Mr. Lee, is the owner of “Happy China” restaurant just across the street. Which is where we all went for a food feast after the liturgical one. We’d never been there before. As we entered, Mr. Lee seated us himself (“near the buffet, so you won’t have to walk so far”) and then halfway through our repast he came back and sat with us to talk. We weren’t far from the entrance door. Pretty soon a man entered with his two young sons—maybe 7 and 9 yrs old. Mr. Lee recognized them as frequent customers and called the trio over to talk with them.

There was only one available chair, so Papa and one son remained standing. He started talking to the boys. After a couple of sentences he was talking about Jesus! “Do you boys know Jesus? Do you go to church?” They nodded. Papa didn’t pull the boys away, so Mr. Lee continued to commend Christ to the kids. “I have no education,” he said, “but I do know how to cook. And I



do know about Jesus. My life is happy because of Jesus. That's why I call my restaurant Happy China." The testimony continued with all three –better, all five of us–on the receiving end. "Jesus makes your life happy too. Do you believe that?" The boys nodded again. "OK, now I show you to your table."

Happy China the mission field. Mr. Lee the missionary.

You've got the words "GO and TELL" on that banner behind the altar here in church. Sounds like you believe the same thing Mr. Lee does. Washington MO is the mission field. You are the missionaries.

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## **A Bertram Memorandum. Another Artifact from Seminex Days and the Wars of Missouri**

Colleagues,

Bob Bertram's widow, Thelda, and Crossings volunteers Cathy Lessmann and Michael Hoy keep finding stuff – fantastic stuff – as they continue to sort through the reams and reams of papers in Bob's (I forget how many) filing cabinets. Bob died in March of 2003, but the glean-team isn't done yet. They have already gone through all the stuff stored in his computer – and found three book manuscripts there, no one of them ever quite "finished" in Bob's judgment for him to send off to a publisher. The gleaners, with Michael taking the lead, got one of them shipshape a while ago and sent it off to Eerdmans Publishing Co. With a nudge from Bob's one-time colleague at the Lutheran seminary in Chicago, Paul Rorem, it got into the

Eerdmans pipeline. They already list it on their website—[www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com)—scheduled to appear yet this year. Title: A Time for Confessing. 248 pp. Paperback. “This book is about faithful witnesses – from the Reformation to South African apartheid to Bonhoeffer – to the promise of Jesus Christ. Even amid trials, these faithful followers have testified that the gospel is authority enough for the church’s life and unity. This volume brings the light of publication to several important essays by the late Robert Bertram, perhaps the most unpublished Lutheran theologian of the 20th century.” One chapter examines the Seminex era in the Missouri Synod as such a “Time for Confessing.”

The item below is this week’s find in the Bertram papers. The context is this: In the summer of 1973, Missouri Synod convention delegates declared the “faculty majority” of Concordia Seminary (later to become the Seminex faculty) to be false teachers “not to be tolerated in the Church of God.” The newly-elected Seminary Board of Control was instructed by the convention to implement this resolution. The board’s first move was to declare the oldest five of this group, all over 65 years of age, “honorably retired or transferred to modified service.” If I remember aright these colleagues were H. Bouman, R. Caemmerer, A. Piepkorn, A. Repp, and L. Wuerffel.

When the news of this action hit the campus Bob Bertram went to his typewriter (no computers then) and sent this memo around to all the rest of us “intolerable” ones. The deep irony is that on that very day—I think it was a Friday—as Bob was composing this, one of those five, Arthur Carl Piepkorn, was walking up DeMun Avenue to the nearby barber-shop to get a haircut. He died of a coronary in the barber’s chair. After his death, his widow, Miriam, said: “They thought they could retire him. God took care of that.”

Bob himself was only fifty-two in 1973 and thus escaped the

forced retirement purge. But already then he'd become the avuncular interpreter to us about what was really happening. You'll see for yourself in what he says below.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## ***A Personal Memorandum***

*13 December 1973*

*To: My Brothers and Sister in the Faculty Majority and Staff*

*From: Robert Bertram*

- 1. The saddest thing about our present synodical administration is that it is silencing the Word of God.*
  - 2. The way our synodical administration is silencing God's Word is by silencing those who teach that Word.*
  - 3. These teachers have been speaking the Word to our synodical situation, and that is why their Word of God is being silenced.*
  - 4. Not only in the Synod's classrooms is the Word of God being silenced, but also in the Synod's pulpits.*
  - 5. But those who are doing the silencing prefer to conceal their motives, for fear that people might see what really is being silenced: not just preachers and teachers but the very Word of God.*
  - 6. What is encouraging in all this is that with each new silencing of the Word, the Word seems to be getting a better hearing than ever before.*
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1. The saddest thing about our present synodical administration is that it is silencing the Word of God. The saddest thing about this administration is not its political intrigue, its power-plays, its “speaking out of both sides of the mouth,” or even its personal cruelties and persecutions, shameful as all these are. What is sadder still is the way the Word of God in our midst is more and more being put to silence. Less and less does the Word have free course for the joy and edifying of God’s holy people.
2. The way our synodical administration is silencing God’s Word is by silencing those who teach that Word. This happened again recently at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, when the Board of Control scheduled another group of professors for removal. But the same thing is happening on other synodical campuses as well, and will be happening more and more. Teachers of the Word are being silenced and, with them, so is the Word they speak.
3. These teachers have been speaking the Word to our synodical situation, and that is why their Word of God is being silenced. It is a shoe that fits. What is being silenced is not the Word of God in the abstract, the Word in some academic classroom lecture, the Word in technical theological discussions. No, the Word of God that is being muzzled is that Word of His which applies to our own synodical sins. God’s Word of Law has been exposing the creeping legalism in high places. So that Word now gets condemned as “rebellion.” And God’s Word of Gospel has been trying to replace the legalism. So now that Word, too, must be discredited – by labels like “wishy-washy,” “reductionism,” “permissive.” As soon as the Gospel is made relevant it is seen as meddling. What is being silenced in the Synod is not the Word of God in general but the Word which strikes close to home.

4. Not only in the Synod's classrooms is the Word of God being silenced, but also in the Synod's pulpits. Many pastors are being inhibited from speaking out. For a pastor to speak a Word of prophetic criticism against oppression in his own church body has now become, for him too, a risky thing. For him to free his people to do something about that oppression, especially when some of the people themselves may support the oppression, requires unusually heroic Gospel preaching. As a result many a preacher's conscience is being tried, and his people are being deprived. One pastor reports how a delegation from his congregation asked, "Pastor, why haven't you shared these concerns with us – don't you trust that we can handle them?" Even the Word from our pulpits is being silenced.
5. But those who are doing the silencing prefer to conceal their motives, for fear that people might see what really is being silenced: not just preachers and teachers but the very Word of God. That guilty secret is being disguised. Though more and more servants of the church are being silenced out of their pulpits and classrooms, the true reason for their removal – namely, the Word of God they have been speaking – is kept under wraps. Instead the pretext is that these men are simply not needed or that they are too old, or perhaps no reason at all is given. Those who are silencing them simply do not dare to accuse them openly of false doctrine. For such accusations would simply call attention all over again to the Word they speak. And that is what the Word-silencers fear most of all.
6. But what is encouraging in all this is that with each new silencing of the Word, the Word seems to be getting a better hearing than ever before. The very suppression of that Word emboldens those who speak it to speak it more

*openly, more relevantly, more pointedly to the situation at hand. The same way with the people. The more they are being kept in the dark, the more they are turning out for meetings and movements and media which provide them the whole truth and a full Word of God. No sooner is the Word silenced forcibly in one place and it erupts spontaneously in two other places. When in recent memory has there been so keen and widespread an interest in God's Word for our synodical situation, whether His Word of judgment or His Word of promise, as there is right now? And nothing has fanned the flames of that interest as much as the current oppression. Precisely as we reveal how the Word is being silenced, we reveal the Word itself. That way the current problems of our Synod, even if they may never be solved, can at least be kept from going to waste.*

*13 December 1973*

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# **Mission Theology for New Congregations**

Colleagues,

Fifty years ago this fall I entered a classroom at Valparaiso University on the teacher-side of the desk for the first time ever. This fall, a half-century later, our local Lutheran School of Theology, an agency of the St. Louis Metro Coalition of Lutheran Congregations, asked me to try it again. But this time I didn't need a lesson plan, didn't even

need to prepare for class. It's a piece of cake called "Conversations with Ed Schroeder." Five sessions. Thursday mornings. A handful of folks actually registered – an ecumenical mix of Methodist, Lutheran and Roman Catholic conversationalists, half of them church-workers, half of them "world-workers." They set the agenda. We talk.

One item for considerable conversation last week was Mission Theology for New Congregations. Topic-proposer was Pastor Robert Downs, ELCA "mission developer" a few miles east of St. Louis at Highland, Illinois. Conversation was so lively, and Bob so articulate, that I asked him to write up the discussion, add some more, if he wished, ship it to me so I could pass it on to you. He agreed to do so. Here it is.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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**Rev. Robert Downs**  
**Living Waters Lutheran Church**  
**A mission of the ELCA**  
**Highland, Illinois**

*Recently I read an article by Sally Morgenthaler entitled "Worship as Evangelism" dated September 4, 2007. I don't know Sally, but she apparently is a church leader who has promoted contemporary worship as an evangelism tool and ran a website named Sacramentis for this purpose. But she has grown uneasy with her experience of what has happened in churches that have used contemporary worship – particularly mega-churches. She claims it has created a sub-culture of "worship-driven*

churches" that promotes a self-absorbed narcissistic kind of Christianity that avoids the hard work of a more authentic kind of Christianity.

She goes on to cite many statistics that show that worship-driven churches really do not reach the unchurched, as many believe, but are actually reaching the presently churched – mostly disgruntled people from dwindling mainline denominations.

She also wrote about how the mega-church contemporary worship model for church planting had peaked around 1998. As she put it: "Contemporary church plants that hadn't reached critical mass (300 to 400) by the end of the '90s were in deep trouble." People have become wary/weary of the slick church starts with catchy logos, contemporary worship, and portable churches meeting in schools and strip malls. The heyday of that model of church planting is over.

She shows that already established mega-churches (which are still growing in numbers exponentially) are most successful in the Bible belt region of the US and that their success is due largely to the high quality and great variety of programs they offer to church shoppers. She goes on to cite statistics that show that the number of people attending worship in America continues to decline, even in spite of some growing mega-churches and that mega-churches are not successful in reaching the unchurched.

She also cited the 2003 film "Saved" – an exaggerated satire of the whole phenomenon she is despairing – as an example that depicts much of the hypocrisy of this brand of Christianity. She also cites a long quote from an un-churched journalist who attended a mega-church worship service in which nothing positive was said about the experience. The point of this quote



seemed to be that mega-church contemporary worship is contrived, theologically weak, emotionally flat, and aesthetically pallid.

Her conclusion is that the best way to reach the unchurched is to get out of church buildings and away from the worship services altogether and do some form of ministry where the people are at in the world. She fails to explain to the reader what this may be. She dismisses completely the whole idea of reaching the unchurched through worship services – of any kind/style/variety – but especially contemporary worship.

She concludes her article with the words:

“I am currently headed further outside my comfort zones than I ever thought I could go. I am taking time for the preacher to heal herself. As I exit the world of corporate worship, I want to offer this hope and prayer. May you, as leader of your congregation, have the courage to leave the “if we build it, they will come” world of the last two decades behind. May you and the Christ-followers you serve become worshippers who can raise the bar of authenticity, as well as your hands. And may you be reminiscent of Isaiah, who, having glimpsed the hem of God’s garment and felt the cleansing fire of grace on his lips, cried, ‘Here am I, send me.’”

As I reflected on this article, it seemed to me that Sally is a woman who has discovered that her god was made out of wood. There are no silver bullets or magic pills in evangelism – and to think that contemporary worship will save the church or save anything else for that matter is rather naive. The question is whether it is sometimes helpful. I believe it can be, in limited ways.

I know that in the 23 years I served as a pastor of three

traditional Lutheran congregations, I could probably write an equally scathing and depressing critique of the hypocrisy that went on. Instead of the “worship-driven church” I could write about the “family-driven church” or the “clique-driven church” or worst of all, the “budget-driven church.” There were many self-absorbed, disconnected, and smug folks who enjoyed traditional liturgies as they did fine wines and who boasted at being a friendly church, just so long as you agreed with most of their opinions – about everything. I’ve seen how evangelism was considered more as a practical way of increasing revenue than as the mission of bringing the gospel to those who haven’t heard it. People are money and money is good because it takes money to run a church – it’s as simple as that. And then, in the midst of all this hypocrisy, there were always some genuine saints.

The mega-church dilemma described in this article simply sounds like the church got sucked into the powerful vortex of American consumerism. The mission congregation I am attempting to start, Living Waters, is too small to even be a player in that game – although it is sometimes tempting to want to become a player in such a game! To become a big church, with big money, big crowds, big productions, a big building, big everything – a great big success – with me as the glorious leader – a big shot. Yes, to become a player in the world of big Christianity is always a temptation. But quite frankly, I’m getting a little too old for all that and I don’t think my heart could take the stress that would be involved.

I think the article is correct in pointing out that people are wary of the church. At least, in my brief experience as a Mission Developer, I have gotten the feeling that many people are wary of a new church start.

Sometimes, as a mission developer, I feel like I’m supposed to

create something “different.” And that I need to tell people: “Living Waters is different... it’s unique... it’s not like what you’ve experienced in the past. Living Waters is authentic – we’re the real thing.” To which they will reply (if Sally Morganthaler’s insights are correct): “That’s what they all say.”

In a world where being different is the same, where creativity is old hat, where relevance is irrelevant, where new is old, where everything has been said before and nothing works, and where our best ideas are never good enough – I suppose you might wind up praying a prayer like the one Sally Morganthaler wrote at the conclusion of her article – hoping beyond the hopelessness of it all. Like Isaiah’s vision in the temple, praying: “Here am I, send me” with the same resignation as a kamikaze pilot. (Sorry, but I think her retreat into mysticism at the conclusion was a little overstated).

When it comes to worship style, I don’t believe chanting the liturgy and wearing vestments will help Living Waters share the promises of God any more effectively than singing contemporary Christians songs – if I did, I’d go Gregorian in a heartbeat. Also, I don’t believe contemporary worship songs are vastly more effective than traditional songs and liturgies either. What I do believe is that no matter what style of worship we pursue, there will always be hypocrisy – not because of the worship style but because of sinful human nature. Bongos and guitars will not save us from this. Neither will pipe organs and Bach chorales.

I believe Jesus summarized it best when he taught:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord,

*Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoer*

*On a more hopeful note, Jesus also taught:*

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:1-5*

*I can sympathize with Sally’s anguish over church decline (I feel the same anguish – that’s why I became a developer in the first place) and I have no reason to doubt the statistics she has put together. I don’t even find myself at odds with some of the caustic characterizations of mega-church contemporary worship that she described; however, I still think some form of corporate worship is essential even in a mission start. The promises of God must be heard and received in order to be lived and applied; and you can’t send people out unless you gather them in. How else will we find the courage to go out into this world of pleasure and pain – of plenty and want – and make any real difference?*

*I have been using mostly contemporary music at Living Waters for many reasons (some better than others). Here are the reasons:*

1. Because everyone advised that this is what would work in a new church start.
2. Because, in the congregation I served prior to accepting a call as a developer, our contemporary worship service did attract some new people.
3. Because contemporary worship does not require people to learn how to reenact the Middle Ages in order to participate.
4. Because I believe most people do not get much meaning out of the very meaning-filled hymns that are in traditional Lutheran hymnals (they are too busy just trying to figure out the unfamiliar melodies and strange harmonies).
5. I thought by doing something different, we might accomplish something different (but Sally has made it clear that what I'm doing is not different at all).

(Note: I have recently added some more traditional songs to our worship gatherings). But I do what I do out of the freedom that comes from the gospel. If I find better reasons for anything at Living Waters – including song selections and worship style – I'm willing to change. I'm just not willing to scrap worship services altogether.

So far, Living Waters is too small to develop its own subculture – “worship-driven” or anything else – we're just driven and trying to find a way to break through to people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is not easy and some of the signs of burnout are already present in our small group. Some days I need to remind myself of what God promised: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” Isaiah

# Astronomy/Cosmology Breakthroughs and the God Question

Colleagues,

Steve Kuhl, President of the Crossings Community, provides this week's ThTh post. Steve's a Seminex alum, came into the seminary "through a side door" from a career in aeronautical engineering, did his Ph.D on something like "Christ and Culture when American Agriculture is the Culture in Question." He's been doing "science and theology" ever since. Though that is not the job he gets paid for. Associate Professor of Historical Theology is his current title. Where he carries out that calling is, of all places, at Roman Catholic institutions of higher learning. His first such professorial workplace was the RC diocesan seminary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Just this fall he moved over to the Dept of Religious Studies at Cardinal Stritch University—also in Milwaukee. Steve works in this ecumenical collegium without hiding (so he claims) his law-gospel DNA for doing theology. "They knew who I was, and they (still) asked me to teach for them," he tells me. Today's ThTh post was Steve's presentation a fortnight ago at the fall meeting of ITEST, the Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology. ITEST started out some 40 years ago here in St. Louis, a collaborative initiative of two "Roberts," one a Roman Catholic Jesuit, one a Lutheran, both named Bob. Bob Brungs was a physicist and a priest at St. Louis University,

and Bob Bertram, a theology prof at Concordia Seminary at that time and then later at Seminex, and later still the patriarch of Crossings. Both Bobs co-chaired ITEST gatherings until their recent deaths. The Bertram half of these Bob-sey twins finessed me to the ITEST podium on a couple of occasions. Two of the papers I presented in days gone by at ITEST meetings—one a conference on DEATH AND DYING, another when ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE was the theme—are on the Crossings website, <[www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org)>. At least one of Bob's ITEST papers is also archived there, his classic HOW TO BE TECHNOLOGICAL THOUGH THEOLOGICAL: AN ANSWER FOR "FABRICATED MAN" from 1975.

When Marie and I began galavanting around the planet as "global mission volunteers" in 1993 I dropped out of ITEST conversations, but Steve carries on the Aha! of Augsburg Catholicism amongst the ITESTers, as you will see below.

Peace and joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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*Here are Steve's own words about the context for his text. The following piece is a response I gave to the three keynote presenters at the recent ITEST conference held on September 21-23, 2007. (ITEST's website is <[www.faithscience.org](http://www.faithscience.org)> and we thank them for giving us permission to publish this piece.) The conference theme was "Astronomy/Cosmology Breakthroughs and the God Question." The three main speakers were all Roman Catholics whose primary work is in some field of science.*

*Brother GUY CONSOLMAGNO is an Astronomer at the Vatican Observatory and presented a paper entitled "Planetary Science Breakthroughs and the God Question." His focus was twofold: He*

explained 1) the scientific methods Astronomers use to find new stars, planets, etc. and 2) the history of how “breakthroughs” in Astronomy have led to different cosmologies and impacted theological and ecclesiological thought.

STEPHEN BARR is a renowned particle physicist who has been deeply involved in the faith/science dialog. His most recent book on theology and science is “Modern Physics and Ancient Faith” (University of Notre Dame Press, 2003). Barr’s paper was entitled “Anthropic Arguments, Multiverses and Design Arguments: Future Prospects.”

Barr focused on the recent debate between (theistic and atheistic) scientists concerning the so-called “anthropic coincidences” that permeate the scientific data and which give interpretive rise to the so-called “Anthropic Principle.” That anthropic principle is the idea that the only plausible explanation for the seemingly arbitrary constants that regulate the theorems of modern physics is that, from the instant of the Big Bang, human intellectual life was intended.

At the center of this debate is the meaning of the incredible “fine tuning” of the universe that makes life as we know it possible. Barr notes that some say it is evidence of a cosmic Designer, while others say it is explained by a theory of “multiverses,” that there are many universes, all with different constants and feature, and that they all arose by chance—ours included. Finding ways to test these ideas is key to science’s future.

NEYLE SOLLEE is a pathologist by profession (and thus a user of microscopes) but has also been deeply involved (as a user of telescopes) in Observatory Astronomy. His paper is entitled “From Microscopes to Telescopes: A Pathologist Looks at the ‘Problem of God’ and the Integration of the Book of Nature and



*the Book of Scripture."*

*Arguing that good science and good faith go hand in hand, Sollee advances a modern version of the teleological/cosmological argument for the existence of God, drawing on the awe-inspiring picture of the universe that modern science presents and the theological tradition of Thomas Aquinas. It is significant that all these papers either assume or specifically identify \_the\_ "God Question" as the question of the existence of God and that the "God problem" we face today is getting people to see God in the scientific evidence. It is that assumption that is at the heart of my response.*

*Peace,  
Steven K.*

**Steven C. Kuhl**

**Which God Question?**

**A Response to Consolmagno, Barr, and Sollee on  
Cosmology, Astronomy and the Question of God  
ITEST, September 21-23, 2007**

- 1. I want to begin by thanking our three keynote presenters for anchoring us in the topic and especially for their willingness to send their unpolished papers to me so that I might have a little more time to read and reflect on them. Being myself a perfectionist, I know first hand how anxiety-producing it can be to let your thoughts into the public before you yourself are finished shaping them. So thanks for your generosity in that regard.***Which God Question? The Existence Question or the Soteriological Question**
- 2. What I don't see in any of the papers is a wrestling with the "meaning," ambiguity, or intent of the conference theme as stated: The God Question: Cosmology and*

Astronomy. So I am going to take some time to do that here. First, what is the topic? Is the topic "the God question [as asked in] cosmology and astronomy; or is it "the God question [as answered by] cosmology and astronomy? More importantly, what do we mean by the "God question"? Is the definite article "the" misleading? Might there not be several kinds of God questions, questions that different disciplines may or may not be competent methodologically or instrumentally either to ask into clarity or to answer with any degree of confidence? The conference title, as I read it, explicitly evokes only two disciplines by name, Cosmology and Astronomy. Theology is only implicitly implied because the other two are being called upon to talk about theology's central focus of concern, God and God's relation to the world.

3. Having said that, from our three presenters, it seems that the "God question" as they understand it has to do with "whether God exists" and the "God problem," as they like to call it, is a matter of demonstrating God's existence on some rational, scientific grounds. This is certainly the "God Question" that often appears in the popular press. Neyle Sollee alone attempts to address this "God Question" (or "God problem") from a theological perspective, and I commend him for that. But, unfortunately, he does so by way of what seems to me to be a rather a-critical presentation of the Nature-Grace perspective of Thomas Aquinas (specifically *Summa Theologica* I.2.1-3), particularly, the strong teleological dimension of Aquinas' thought. I call his presentation "a-critical" because it ignores the vast philosophical and theological work since Hume and Kant that has credibly, in my judgment, relegated much of that interesting (teleological) aspect of Aquinas' thought and method to the category of the history of ideas.

[For example, in his presentation, Sollee elucidated this tradition by way of the metaphor that Astronomy beholds the “finger prints” of God throughout the cosmos. But does it? Does Astronomy really give such obvious proof of God’s existence? Isn’t Sollee really describing a pre-existing faith in the existence of God that is being read into the data, not the existence of God being read out of the data?

This illustration might help clarify my point. When detectives go to a crime scene they certainly see evidence of a disturbance. That’s obvious. But does that constitute evidence of who did it? No. For that they need evidence of the criminal himself; they need finger prints, for example. And the “good thief” leaves no such evidence behind. That, I submit, is the way the biblical God works in the world. In general, God the creator leaves no finger prints of himself in his handiwork. What we know of him comes by way of “revelation,” self-disclosure (usually in the form of proclamation), not investigation. God is far more elusive than the rationalist tradition imagines; and for various reasons that will be discussed more below.] (fn 1)\_

To be sure, the hope of such a “rational proof” for the existence of God does still abound in the popular human imagination: Creation Science and Intelligent Design Theory, for example, are built on it, as are, perhaps, some interpretations of the so-called anthropic principle. Nevertheless, I think that such a hope is both illusory and unfaithful to the Christian view of God as incomprehensible: ungraspable and above the reach of human reason.(fn 2)\_

4. Therefore, the question of demonstrating the existence of

God, I submit, is not the "God question" that Christian Theology (biblically indicated and traditionally carried out, at least, pre-Scholasticism) has traditionally claimed competency to answer. Indeed, the nature of God's "existence" as understood in Christian theology is such that it cannot be proved in rational fashion; and it is the paradoxical burden of Christian theology to expound that fact in as reasonable way as possible. This epistemological limit is not meant to be a stop-gap, but the starting-point for another very practical "God question," what I will call the "soteriological question." Unfortunately, the "existence question" has often been a great distraction from the "soteriological question" which, to the best of my knowledge, is the one theological question to which Christian Theology claims a unique competency. That question, to borrow language from this Sunday's text (Luke 16:1-13) in the Revised Common Lectionary, goes something like this: how do we give an adequate accounting to God for our (mis)management of this, God's cosmos? That is the "God problem" Christian theology knows something about.

From the perspective of Christian Theology, to focus too doggedly (or dogmatically) on the question of demonstrating God's existence as a prerequisite for any other question about God turns the "existence question" into either a ploy at self-justification or self-delusion: Self-justification because if the answer is "no," then, there is no God to render an account to, only ourselves (still, no small matter); or self-delusion because if the answer is "yes," then religious people tend to make the presumptuous leap that by means of their very religiosity, they are able to make an adequate accounting of their stewardship. Indeed, to focus too dogmatically on the existence of God distracts also from

*the historical Event of Jesus Christ as God's own, gracious answer to the soteriological God question, which is the one thing Christian Theology claims unique competency in. But more on all this later.*

*By the way, and I hope we can also talk about this more later, this soteriological God question (and answer) is not altogether missing from Aquinas' theological vision. (See, for example, ST I.1.1 "the Nature and Extent of Sacred Doctrine" and ST III.49, "The Effects of Christ's Passion.") If Christians want to use Aquinas as a source of theological imagination (as increasingly not only Roman Catholics, but also some Protestants have (fn 3), they would do well to focus, not on Aquinas the Aristotelian Philosopher, but on Aquinas the biblical, Christian Theologian, taking their cues from the recent Aquinas studies influenced by M-D Chenu and J-P Torrell.*

### **Cosmology and Creation**

5. *What about Cosmology or Astronomy? I submit that like Theology, they too lack the competency to answer "Yes" or "No" the Question of God's existence-and to presume so does a great disservice to them also. Therefore, we must also ask what we mean by "cosmology" and "astronomy" as disciplines of study and the nature of their objects and competencies. To my mind, the object, scope and methods of Astronomy as a "scientific" discovery discipline are well defined within the grasp of human reason. It seeks to understand observable celestial phenomena outside the earth's atmosphere. But the object, scope and methods of the discipline of "cosmology" are not so clear. As The Encyclopedia of Philosophy states, the term stands for a "family of related inquiries, all in some sense concerned with the world at large" of which "two main subgroups may*

be distinguished: those belonging to philosophy and those belonging to science." Whatever light cosmologists in the room can shed on this distinction would be helpful to me.

6. As I understand the term "cosmology," it was first coined in 1728 by the German Rationalist Philosopher Christian von Wolff in his *Discourse on Philosophy in General*. (Wolff is the bridge figure between Leibniz and Kant in the history of philosophy.) Cosmology was a catchall word meant to ask questions and seek understanding about, not the various "pieces" that make up the world, but the "world as a whole." Cosmology, as Wolff presented it, entails identifying the root, elemental, building-block "substance" of the world ("simples," as he called them) and, in a rather pedantic fashion, follow how they come together, observing and explaining the emerging collectives in mathematical, theoretical terms. The cosmos is in some sense the sum of its parts. Therefore, "cosmology" emerged not strictly as a "scientific" discipline or concept, but as a philosophical or hermeneutical one, as philosophers, under the materialistic impulse of Modernity, strove to update its work, relating its traditional concerns to the findings of modern science, in this case, Newtonian physics and its mathematical explanation of things, which it took as providing proof for a kind of "unified theory" of the physical world (and by analogy of its metaphysics, its sub- or super-structure, depending on one's outlook) that is thoroughly rational and comprehensible to the human mind.
7. Although I'm not certain if it was Wolff's intent, the word, so it seems to me, has come to replace the word "creation" as the preferred scientific and philosophical description of the whole material (fn 4). The term "cosmology," like the term "creation," understands the

world as an "ordered whole" that has integrity in all its parts. But unlike the term "creation," cosmology assumes that this "ordered whole" stands as-a-whole on its own, autonomously, in an absolute sense. Therefore, for cosmology, as both a scientific and philosophical discipline, the question of "origins" is fundamental, and it is assumed that it can be answered in a naturalistic, rational way. To know something's origin is to know it in its totality.

8. Of course, what cosmology dismisses from its outlook is the theological idea of *creatio ex nihilo* (namely, that the world is "created out of nothing") which is, to my knowledge, the only assertion Christian Theology makes about cosmology, the world as whole. Cosmology, in other words, presupposes a "chain of creation," to use Guy Consolmango's term, that can be followed rationally to its beginning, to its origins, which must be some "physical" phenomenon. But Christian Theology says paradoxically that the "source" (meaning its material origin, not its divine maker) of the world-as-a-whole is "nothing." The Creator creates the cosmos *ex nihilo*. This is not a God-of-the-gaps teaching, but one that is rooted, ironically, in Christianity's (and Judaism's) demythologizing, demystifying, indeed, naturalizing view of the created world vis-à-vis all spiritualizing tendencies, whether political or religious or philosophical. To say that the creation in all its parts is a "natural" order does not contradict the fact that as-a-whole it exists *ex nihilo*, that is, its existence is absolutely contingent on God the Creator.
9. Moreover, this teaching (*creatio ex nihilo*) is also inseparable from Christianity's understanding of the human person as God's "created co-creator," to use Philip Hefner's pithy term. Humanity is that part of the

creation created by God to be the “steward” (not Lord) of the creation. This, I submit, is the fundamental point of the idea that humanity is created in the image of God. (Gen. 1:26 is theologically consistent with Gen. 2:15). From the perspective of Christian Theology, then, the rise of modern scientific inquiry is a natural, essential aspect of our human vocation as steward, as a species that is accountable how we engage the world. Although Christian Theology holds this self-understanding as an article of faith that can’t be proved, yet look how impossible it is to get away from the fact of it. Our very life-together finds us constantly driven to hold each other accountable for our use and abuse of the creation (Cf. Gen. 3:12-13), as though that impulse within us is part of the very warp and woof of the fabric of creation. Yet try to prove it scientifically? You can’t.

10. While the idea that God is the Creator who creates ex nihilo is an article of faith, it is an article that affirms the scientific sensibility of Occam’s razor: Do not add metaphysical entities beyond their need. One danger today is that some Christians want to interpret the Big Bang, for example, as proof of a Creator who creates ex nihilo and, thus, the end of cosmology. The irony is that the Christian Doctrine of Creation by definition denies such proof. Therefore, in reality, the Doctrine of Creation says to conscientious scientists, “keep going!” It urges them to look deeper and see farther, if they can, into mystery and wonder of the “natural” astrological-cosmological phenomenon-even that which might lie beyond the Big Bang: not to prove or disprove God, but to further our human vocation to be the stewards and caretakers of this world. There is no hope or danger of either proving or disproving God: such is



the nature of the incomprehensible God as the Christian faith asserts. The only danger is false belief: that is, not believing and living as though we are God's stewards and instead believing and living as though we are our own lords. That is the great temptation that is-dare I say-our cosmological "fall" (Genesis 3:4-5), which as Paul asserts has cosmological consequences (Cf. Romans 8:18-25).

In the spirit of Augustine, faith by its very nature seeks understanding, but the very thing true faith rests upon-which for him is the Creator God who is known to be merciful in Jesus Christ (the soteriological answer to human restlessness)-is finally incomprehensible (cf. Confession I.1) to reason and investigation and is accessible only to faith as a divine gift or illumination. But it is believed, not like a fairy tale, but because the One who spoke it is trustworthy, Jesus Christ, who is not simply the "finger print" of God, but the "finger of God" (Luke 20), the Word made flesh, the soteriological answer to the God problem that every steward faces.

### **The Anthropic Principle and Humanity as God's Steward**

11. Stephen Barr immerses us into the complex science that underlies the ongoing debate about the meaning and implications of the so-called "Anthropic Principle" (an idea coined by Brandon Carter in 1973) or, as he and others prefer to call it, the "anthropic coincidences" (coined earlier by Rob Dicke in 1961). The idea, as I understand it, is linked to our recent knowledge of just how "finely tuned" the cosmic parameters of our universe needed to be microseconds after the Big Bang in order for human life to be as it is in our particular time and place in the universe. For a number of scientists,

religionists, and others, this combination of "coincidences" is too fantastic to be simply called "coincidences." Rather, they constitute what is called the Anthropic Principle, the idea that the universe is the logical outworking of some inner purpose or telos, whether mystical or naturalistic, designed to bring forth intelligent human life. We, the human creature, are the ultimate explanation of the cosmos. For many adherents of the Anthropic Principle, the implications of these coincidences for religion is obvious.

12. In my judgment, the Anthropic Principle is a tautology, a statement that the world is as it is because the world is as it is. Moreover, the Anthropic Principle (composed of amazing coincidences) is analogous to the Intelligent Design Theory (rooted in the wonder of irreducible complexity). Neither of these ideas, in my judgment, is science in the modern sense of the term; and neither comes close to anything like proving the existence of God. They may well be expressions of faith in some kind of benevolent Creator-God read into the scientific data, but they are not proof of the Christian God read out of the scientific data. That God is by definition incomprehensible, as I explained above. It may also be true that the more we scientifically explore the world in which we live the more amazing and awe-inspiring it is—but amazement at the natural world is not proof of a divine Creator.
13. If Christian Theology can speak of something like an "Anthropic Principle" in the world, it would not be deduced from the cosmic constants and it most certainly would not envision humanity as the lord of or the reason for the existence of the cosmos. Rather, it would be rooted in something more existential: like our human vocation to be stewards of the creation. The data of this

Principle would be twofold, consisting of 1) our innate drive as a species to do science presumably for the sake of a better stewardship of this natural world and 2) our innate sense of holding one another accountable for that stewardship. While those existential data do not prove the existence of God, they do correlate with what Christianity confesses to know about God: 1) that God is the Lord and creator of a cosmos that is wholly other than himself (Gen 1 and 2), 2) that God is the One who has called us into our human role as stewards of the creation (Cf. Gen 1:26-31; 2: 2:15-17), and 3) that God is the one who holds us accountable to him for that stewardship, though it be through the intimate, historical inter-workings of the creation (Genesis 2-3, Rom. 1:18-3:20).

Ultimately, the intellectual gifts that God has given humanity are sufficient for us to be stewards, but they are not sufficient for us to be lords of creation, that is, to comprehend God or apprehend his deity. But there is also a theological reason also for this intellectual limit: God is generally incomprehensible not only for epistemological reasons, but on account of his wrath, on account of which sinful stewards "suppress the truth" about God (Rom. 1:18). Therefore, any naïve venture into the "existence question" is ultimately fraught with danger and begs a more basic question (basic, that is, to our existence) the "soteriological question": how do stewards survive the wrath of God?

The existential data do ultimately corroborate the "soteriological question," rooted in the anxiety-inducing demand that we render an adequate accounting to God for our stewardship (Cf. Luke 16:1-13). Thankfully, the sufficient answer to that question has been historically

revealed in no uncertain terms in the Event of Jesus Christ. There is no question about the existence of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. The only question is: do we believe him? Do we trust his promise, his claim, to be the One in whom God reconciles to himself the whole cosmos-steward and stars and all? With him, as we believe so we have.

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1. ) The brackets contain a summary of an adlib to what I originally wrote in response to the idea of "God's finger prints in the cosmos" that Neyle Sollee had added to his presentation. It is important to add it here because subsequent discussion makes reference to it.
2. ) For a lucid description of this, see, for example, Philip Cary, "The Incomprehensibility of God and the Origin of the Thomistic Concept of the Supernatural," *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 340-55.
3. ) Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views of on the thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985); Eugene Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); Geisler, Norman L. *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991; Robert L. Reymond, "Dr. John H. Gerstner on Thomas Aquinas as a Protestant," *Westminster Theological Journal* 59.1 (1997): 113-12. For Catholics interested in comparing Aquinas with Protestant thought see, for example, Otto Pesch, *The God Question in Thomas Aquinas and*

*Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972); Denis Janz, "Syllogism or Paradox: Aquinas and Luther on Theological Method," Theological Studies, vol. 59, 1998, pages 3-21.*

4. ) Tore Frangsmyr, "Christian Wolff's Mathematical Method and its Impact on the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Oct. – Dec., 1975), pp. 653-668.

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## Why Seminary?

Colleagues,

Kathryn Kleinhans was a keynote speaker at the big Crossings gathering at the end of January this year. She returns for this week's ThTh post with a message she gave earlier this month to the entering students at Luther Seminary (St. Paul, Minnesota). In real life Kit is a prof and department chair in Religion and Philosophy at the ELCA's Wartburg College, Waverly Iowa, a couple hours' drive south of the seminary. Also wife and mother. Her husband, Alan R. Schulz, serves as pastor at Messiah Lutheran Church in nearby Charles City, Iowa. Both are Seminex alums.

I asked her a while back to "send me something sometime" for a ThTh posting. Couple days ago she sent this. Here's her note about how it came about:

*I was invited to give the opening address at Luther Seminary's "Week One" orientation for incoming students. I was given this assignment: "The working title for the address is 'Why*

*Seminary?", which is meant to address why theological study matters in a world where our 125+ talented new students might have done many other things with their lives."*

You'll be edified, as I was, by what she says.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **Luther Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota. 4 September 2007**

### **WHY SEMINARY?**

How tempting it is to say "Why not?!" and sit down. Or better yet, to invite each of you to the podium, to share with us the story of your unique journey to this place on this day. Why seminary? Perhaps because someone saw your gifts and nudged – or pushed – you in this direction. Perhaps because you have questions that are best wrestled with through study. Perhaps because the call of God in your life has been unrelenting, no matter how often you've tried to find a ship sailing for Tarshish rather than Nineveh. Perhaps in your own life the question has not been "Why seminary?" or "Why not?" but "Why me?!"

Well, here you are. So in some way, it seems that you've already begun to answer the question, at least for yourself, at least for the time being.

Why seminary? Our ancestors had a practical answer. In the early days of what would become the United States, clergy were imported from "the old country" – whichever old country happened to be yours. In time, an apprenticeship model developed for

training and approving pastors. A young man – and it was a man – trained with an experienced clergyman, studying the texts and learning the practices of ministry from one who had already demonstrated mastery of them. Eventually, American Lutherans – and other denominations as well – formed seminaries, pooling both their human resources and their financial resources to create formal schools of theological education.

You may know that the root meaning of the word “seminary” is seedbed. Just as one tills the soil and tends a garden to provide conditions for the growth of plants, so a seminary is a place for the cultivation and growth of leaders. You students fill multiple roles in this horticultural image. You are the seeds planted in the soil of this place, this seminary, this seedbed. For the duration of your studies, you will be nurtured, weeded around, carefully pruned, and well fertilized, until you are ready to be transplanted into the soil where you will take root and serve, whether as pastor, teacher, or some other kind of leader. But it is also true that you yourselves are the soil, the good soil in which the seed of God’s Word has already been planted, and watered, and in which that seed will continue to blossom and bear fruit during the course of your studies – and during the course of your life and ministry.

Why Luther Seminary? I’m sure the Admissions Office has a collection of standard answers to that question: the right size, the right location, enough financial aid, a compatible theological orientation. But those are “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” answers to the question. “Why Luther Seminary?” is a question best answered by the mission statement:

Luther Seminary educates leaders for Christian communities

- called and sent by the Holy Spirit
- to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ

- and to serve in God's world.

What has always struck me about this mission statement, especially when one sees it printed out with its phrases set off by those cross-shaped bullets, is its grammatical ambiguity – or, better said, its complexity. In the English language, with its lack of case endings, it's not clear whether the qualifiers

- “called and sent by the Holy Spirit”
- “to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ”
- “and to serve in God's world”

describe the leaders whom the seminary educates or the Christian communities for whom they are educated. Is this a lack of clarity? Or is it rather a surplus of meaning? Why Luther Seminary? Because Spirit-called and Spirit-sent communities created it and continue to support it – for the education of Spirit-called and Spirit-sent leaders – for such communities.

But let's get down to basics.

Why seminary? Each of you has come to this place with certain gifts and skills, but you will leave with more. You are, after all, here to learn. And there's a lot to learn. Biblical languages, exegesis, church history, systematic theology, the theology and culture of other religions, preaching, pastoral care, worship; the list goes on and on. There is, frankly, much more to learn than you can possibly pack into the two years or the four years that you will be students here. Every generation of practitioners quickly becomes aware of “all the things they didn't teach us in seminary.”

But your seminary studies will lay in you a solid foundation of knowledge; your seminary studies will require you to practice what you preach and teach, both inside and outside the classroom; and your seminary studies will cultivate in you the



attitudes and behaviors of life-long learners, so that “all the things they didn’t teach us in seminary” are not a dead end but an opportunity for continued study and growth.

In this place of theological education called Luther Seminary, it’s appropriate for me to lift up the example of Martin Luther himself as theologian. In the classroom, I like to describe Luther as an occasional and contextual theologian, in contrast to the more traditional concept of a “systematic” theologian. Unlike John Calvin, with his Institutes of the Christian Religion, or Thomas Aquinas, with his Summa theologia [Ed: in American idiom, “theology, the whole ball of wax” – a work he never finished!], Luther never wrote an encyclopedia of Christian theology from A to Z. Instead, he spoke and wrote in response to the occasions that presented themselves: the abuses within the medieval Catholic church, the Peasants War and the Turkish threat, the excesses of other reformers, a barber’s request for advice on how to pray, a soldier’s request for career counseling, and of course let’s not forget the many, many classroom lectures and sermons.

Luther had a system, to be sure: a core understanding of the Gospel of God’s grace for sinners through faith in Christ Jesus along with a commitment to communicate that truth in such a way that people could hear it. But Luther’s writings took the form of “applied theology” rather than a “systematics.” His tireless engagement with the issues of his day suggests Luther as the model of what today we call a public theologian, speaking not just to the church but engaging multiple publics on a wide variety of public matters. Note too that Luther spoke and wrote fluently in two different languages, and by that I don’t just mean the languages of Latin and German, but more importantly the language of the academy and the language of the common people.

However, Martin Luther was no Athena springing fully formed from

the forehead of Zeus. Luther was once – wait for it – a student like you. Many of you are familiar with the dramatic story of Luther's thunderstorm pledge, "Help me, St. Anne, and I will become a monk." Whatever other factors may have been at work in Luther's decision to leave law school and enter a monastery, this story makes it clear that Luther's personal experiences played a central role in shaping his sense of calling – as I'm sure is true for almost every one of us here today. Luther describes his early life in the monastery as being tormented by doubts and anxieties – which, if you haven't experienced yet, don't worry, you will.

Luther's Christ-centered faith and his vocation as a theologian were shaped by his study of the Scriptures and by mentors and advisors, particularly the vicar general of the Augustinian order Johann von Staupitz, who sent Luther to pursue doctoral studies in theology – despite Luther's own reluctance to do so. Over the course of his ministry, Luther had the advantage of working with other gifted colleagues in Wittenberg, Dr. Philipp Melanchthon at the university, Pastor Johannes Bugenhagen at the city church, and others. Personal experience, challenging and nurturing mentors, faithful colleagues, and study itself – all played a role in making Martin Luther who he was – just as those factors have played – and will continue to play – a similar role in shaping you.

Why seminary? If not to learn everything that can be learned, nonetheless to learn the language of theology, its vocabulary, its grammar, its regional and historical dialects. To a certain extent, I view theological education as "practicing speaking the Gospel," so that one becomes fluent in it and can speak it to different people in different circumstances. A story might help to illustrate my point: The summer after my first year of college, I went to Europe (mostly for a Lutherland tour, but we also stopped in Paris on the way home). I saw a swimsuit I liked

in a Parisian department store, and although I had studied French for five years, I actually made several laps around the floor of the department store rehearsing the conversation in my head before I approached a saleswoman. "I'd like to see this in green, please." "I need size such-and-such." "Where may I try it on?" And, of course, I had to think through the possible responses to my questions in order to anticipate my next move. The point is that after five years of straight-A French, I shouldn't have had to take those laps just to buy a swimsuit!

Well, my friends, in the real world of ministry and mission, there is not always time to take a few laps around the store first when one is called upon to speak. One must be fluent enough to communicate – both listening and speaking – when the situation calls for it. Even in preaching, where time for sermon preparation is assumed, if you have to take too many laps around the store in order to put the words together, there will be no time left for the other tasks of ministry.

So a seminary must be a language lab, whose goal is fluency (the ability to interact meaningfully with the native inhabitants) rather than good grades. A seminary teaches the vocabulary and grammar of Christian theology (and critically analyzes the vocabulary and grammar of the world which we are to address). A seminary provides practice partners (one's fellow students) and language coaches (the faculty), and structures immersion experiences (the curriculum) in the language and culture of the faith. The end result is more than a diploma but the ability to communicate God's Word both creatively and faithfully, in the variety of dialectics and contexts that are necessary for our witness actually to be heard and understood by real people.

Sixteenth-century Christendom posed a particular set of challenges for the witness of the Reformers. Our postmodern, post-Christendom context poses a different set of challenges for

our work today. In *The Once and Future Church* (Alban, 1991), theologian Loren Mead gives an insightful description of the emerging postmodern context. During the apostolic era, the church found itself in a context that was often hostile to its message. With the coming of Christendom, the church's environment was at least nominally supportive. But today's environment is a more complex mixture: in some places, still supportive of Christianity; in other places, again hostile to it; and increasingly, uninformed and just plain indifferent.

The complexity of this environment in which we are called to witness and service requires both flexibility and strong interpretive and communicative abilities. Jesus Christ may be the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, but the ability to translate the Good News that we are saved by grace, through faith, for Christ's sake into a language that 21st century women and men will find both understandable and persuasive strikes me as a much tougher interpretive challenge than merely translating the New Testament from Greek into German or English. The Gospel may be a stumbling block, but we must not let our own inability to communicate God's Word effectively become an additional stumbling block.

Let me give you an example of the challenge of communicating effectively. When I was in graduate school, I taught a course on the theology of Martin Luther at ITC, the interdenominational predominantly African American seminary in Atlanta. During the second or third week of the course, I was explaining the theology of the cross, when one of the students said with clear excitement: "Luther was christocentric, wasn't he?! I know the Black church is christocentric, but I didn't know any of the white churches were." You can laugh, or you can cry. For a passionate Lutheran like me, it was painful to realize that the treasure we hold so dear is one we had communicated so poorly that a Christ-centered Lutheranism should come as such a

surprise to another Christian. I know that on the first day of class I had laid out justification by faith as the central theme of Luther's – and Lutheran – theology. But the technical phraseology – useful shorthand in some contexts – had been impenetrable jargon, a stumbling block, at least initially, to one raised in a different Christian tradition.

At times, we must unlearn the familiar in order to communicate in a new way. When I first began to study German in college, I kept filling in the words I didn't know in French. I had to put aside those old familiar language patterns in order to acquire the new vocabulary I needed. Similarly, your theological education will require you to unlearn some of the Sunday School images and the bumper-sticker sound bite theology you come in with, and yes even to put aside at times the denominational shorthand you will surely learn and, I hope, come to hold dear. You will be at a loss for words. You will feel inarticulate for a while. But it is the only way to become multilingual.

Whether as preachers or as teachers, we must keep learning to communicate the Good News in ways that it remains both "good" and "new." This is not something that occurs naturally. We come to the task of theological education already formed by the languages of consumerism, egoism, nationalism, you name it. These are simply inadequate for expressing the depth of the theological tradition. Indeed, they are often in conflict with it. So you will need to learn new languages and develop new fluencies. But you will also need to remember your languages of origin, so that you can translate the fruits of your theological study into the language of your cultural peers.

And translate you must. The spoken Word takes on flesh in and through you. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the importance of what we might call faithful adaptability, communicating the one Gospel, but in as many ways as are

necessary for our witness actually to be heard by real people, people who may not be like us. How odd that today we so often hear people say, “I can’t be all things to all people,” as a kind of disclaimer or excuse, when the New Testament suggests this precisely as a model for evangelism. Paul writes:

*“For though I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, ... to those under the law I became as one under the law ... To those outside the law I became as one outside the law ... To the weak I became weak ... I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” (1 Cor 9:19-23)*

All things to all people, for the sake of the Gospel.

You come to this place with differing gifts. While you are here, certainly you will specialize, learn some things better than others, complete the requirements of one particular degree program (even though you might change degree programs along the way). But beyond these particularities, the challenge – your call – is to be able to communicate with anyone and everyone. Language teachers will tell you that one of the most important characteristics in learning a language is the ability to risk. Just say something. You need to be willing to make mistakes – in the classroom, in your contextual education sites, and beyond. You need to be willing to make mistakes – and you will – but only in that way will gain fluency.

And so, as I said, a seminary is a kind of language lab, in which you will learn and practice the language of theology, analyzing its deep structures, and applying it in situation after situation so that you will be able to speak the Word authentically, fluently, and persuasively when you leave this

place. As you embark on your studies, it is our fervent hope that – like Martin Luther and others before you – you will become a thoroughly contextual, radically public, and multilingual theologian.

You know, I was struck by this statistic on the Quick Facts page of the Luther Seminary website.

*Q: What percentage of the faculty is ecumenical?*

*A: 22%*

Now, I assume that “ecumenical” is being used here as a euphemism for non-ELCA (much as sometimes the word “multicultural” is used to refer to any non-Caucasian constituency.) If everybody else is ecumenical and multicultural, what does that make the rest of us? Parochial? Insular? Having served as one of the white pastors of an African American Lutheran parish which was often pointed to as “one of our multicultural congregations,” this is one of my pet linguistic peeves. Being ecumenical, like being multicultural, is not something that one can be independently. It’s a corporate concept, a corporate reality, requiring all of us together.

I think it’s fair to describe Luther Seminary as having deep Lutheran roots with broad ecumenical branches. The historical self-understanding of Lutheranism as a confessing reform movement within the church catholic means that the Lutheran voice is never exclusive of other Christian voices and dialects. That means, I think, that the better answer to the question, “What percentage of the faculty is ecumenical?” is 100%. And to the extent that ecumenism is understood (at least in part) as having fluency in multiple languages, then the goal should be that by the time you graduate, the student body too will be 100% ecumenical. We might even say 100% Pentecostal.

Let me shift now from the question “Why Seminary?” to the question “How Seminary?”

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has undertaken a major research project examining Preparation for the Professions. The first volume in the study, published just last year, is *Educating Clergy*, by Charles Foster, Lisa Dahill, Lawrence Goleman, and Barbara Wang Tolentino (Jossey-Bass 2006).

I know people who balk at the unspiritual sound of the word profession or professional – although pastoral ministry is arguably the quintessential white collar job. Although professionalism has come to be associated primarily with a certain level of education and expertise, it’s helpful for us to remember that historically the professions – medicine, law, and theology – were those whose members took public oaths of accountability, to the profession itself and by extension to the common good. The term “profession” carries within it personal and interpersonal connotations well beyond the basic notion of “job.”

Philosopher William Sullivan, in his introduction to the *Educating Clergy* volume, states:

*“Professional training has its roots in apprenticeship. Learning as an apprentice typically meant exposure to the full dimensions of professional life – not only the intricacies of esoteric knowledge and peculiar skills but also the values and outlook shared by the members of the profession.” (p. 5)*

Sullivan goes on to identify what he calls “the three apprenticeships of professional education” both classically and today:

- a cognitive or intellectual apprenticeship of knowledge



- a practical apprenticeship of skill
- and an apprenticeship of identity formation

These three apprenticeships are not discrete stages occurring in chronological sequence, but ideally are interwoven throughout professional education. To speak with reference to the M.Div. students for a moment, it is simply not the case that you learn content in your first two years on campus, practice skills out on internship, and pull it all together during your senior year – nor is it the case that you acquire cognitive knowledge in your Bible, theology and church history classes and practical skills in what used to be called the “practical theology” division. As seminary students you are not each apprenticed to a single master teacher or experienced pastor.

Instead you benefit from the resources of the entire seminary and the wider church. Your learning is shaped by what the Educating Clergy study calls interwoven pedagogies of interpretation and of contextualization, pedagogies not only of performance but of formation. You will learn by reading and by doing. And at a foundational level you will learn by being part of a mentoring, modeling community of professional theologians. And make no bones about it, regardless of your degree program, regardless of your envisioned form of ministry, you are a theologian too, although at this point something of an apprentice theologian.

Let me lift up for you two examples of the products of theological education, one less successful than the other.

John Updike’s novel *The Beauty of the Lilies* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1996) begins with the description of an early 20th century Presbyterian minister named Clarence Wilmot losing his faith. Wilmot has been reading the books of atheists and skeptics, in order to refute them, but one day he simply stops believing. “To put it in mathematical terms [Clarence says]:

*it has been bearing in upon me for some time that God is a non-factor – all the equations work without Him... The universe is a pointless, self-running machine, and we are insignificant by-products, whom death will tuck back into oblivion, with or without holy fanfare.” (pp. 74-75)*

After confiding first in his wife and then in one of the elders, the Rev. Mr. Wilmot eventually goes to meet with Thomas Dreaver, the moderator of the presbytery, who insists that Clarence spend a full year continuing to serve his congregation – to test, if you will, his lack of vocation – before he can be released from his responsibilities. Clarence is not nearly as upset by this as my students are when they read Updike’s novel. After all, Clarence feels, the tasks of ministry are familiar and not unpleasant. It’s just that he doesn’t believe anymore.

In the framework of the Carnegie study, Clarence has mastered the practical apprenticeship of skill, but what he lacks is a deeply formed identity sufficient to sustain both him and his ministry for the long haul. Alas, what Clarence needed is not Mr. Dreaver saying “Stick it out, man” but a Johann von Staupitz pointing him back to Christ.

But if knowledge and skill are insufficient without a deeply formed identity, so too identity and skill are insufficient without knowledge.

Several years ago, I was at a conference where Bishop Stephen Bouman of the ELCA Metropolitan New York Synod spoke. He described many exciting, contextually-effective ministries in Metro New York, particularly in poor and ethnic and immigrant communities. During the question and answer period that followed, one of those in attendance asked: Given the need to be responsive to changing contexts, languages, and cultures in ministry, do we need to rethink the structure of seminary

education as a kind of pastor-factory spitting out a standardized product at the end of four years?

Bishop Bouman's response came as a surprise, I'm sure, to the questioner. He said something like this (I'm paraphrasing): If the seminary hadn't forced me to learn all kinds of things that didn't seem particularly relevant at the time, I would not have had any of it to draw upon when I stood at Ground Zero.

Let me share just a few lines from one of Bishop Bouman's published sermons:

*At Ground Zero, breathing lightly through my mask, I searched for hope. Then this came to me like a gift: we are already buried. "Do you not know that you have been buried with Christ Jesus by baptism unto death? So that as Christ was raised by the power of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life."*

"It came to me like a gift," Bishop Bouman says – but this gift comes not out of thin air, but out of the depth of theological education and pastoral experience that had formed him to be who he was and prepared him to speak in that moment. It was not an unmediated gift of the Spirit but a no-less-inspired gift mediated precisely through the foundation of a classic Lutheran seminary education. The things you learn here that may not seem relevant today will prepare you for ministry in places and situations that you cannot possibly anticipate.

So here you are at seminary – ready to learn, ready to do, ready to grow. As you begin your studies, remember that you are not just here to prepare for a calling that you will exercise at some point in the future. You have a current calling precisely as students. You have other callings as well, perhaps spouse, perhaps parent, citizen.

Don't attempt to juggle all these roles and responsibilities. The juggler's task is to keep all the balls in the air. Your task is to live out each of your callings faithfully. As Jack Fortin wisely reminds us, the Christian's goal is not balance but a "centered life," centered in God and in who God has created you to be

For your fundamental calling is as a child of God. It's something of a cliché that people in seminary spend more time talking about God than talking with God. May this not be so for you. Take to heart the double sense of the suffix -ology in the word theology. The academy tends to take the word at face value, as "the study of God," as with biology, psychology, etc. Don't forget that theology also bears the sense of Logos, "the word of God." Theological education is a both/and – both our study of God and our encounter with the living Word of God, in classroom and text, in worship and relationships.

William Sullivan writes in the introduction to *Educating Clergy*:

*"A significant part of every seminary student's intellectual task is to come to grips with the meaning God will have for his or her own life as well as for his or her future professional career." (p. 4) One of the seminary faculty members interviewed for the study expressed the hope "that students will come to see that loving God with the mind is not an alternative to loving God with the heart, but is essential to [our] final integrity." (p. 43)*

**One last word:** While the journey you are beginning is deeply personal, ultimately none of this is about you. I chose as the Gospel text for my ordination John 4, Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. I chose it for its ending, when the Samaritan villagers say to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves,

and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.” (4:42)  
The task of theological education is to form leaders who can speak the truth about God and about God’s world so that others can hear it for themselves.

God bless you in your studies, for God has promised that the Word will not return empty.

Dr. Kathryn Kleinhans  
Wartburg College  
Waverly , Iowa

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# **The Wars of Missouri that Led to Seminex. A Retrospective. Part III: A Sequel from Bob Bertram**

Colleagues,

Last week’s ThTh 483 (part II of a book review of Paul Zimmermann’s “Inside Story” on the Wars of the Missouri Synod) concluded with a postscript:

*D.v., there will be a Part III—a word from beyond the grave, you could almost say. Just discovered a few days ago among Bob Bertram’s papers is the one-page text of his address to the New Orleans Convention of the LCMS in 1973. Bob was speaking against Resolution 3-09, which, when it was indeed adopted (574 to 451), condemned Bob and the rest of us as “false teachers*

*not to be tolerated in the church of God."*

In just one page Bob says it all. Here it is.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **The WORD for New Orleans**

**Robert W. Bertram**

**[1973]**

1. Neither pope nor council nor synodical convention can decide that its doctrinal statements are scriptural. Only the scriptural Word can decide that.
2. If there are doctrinal statements which are believed to be scriptural, that belief can never be imposed but, like the Word itself, can only be confessed – from faith to faith.
3. The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church are the one scriptural statement which every member of the Synod accepts, not because of a majority vote nor even because of a unanimous vote but only because of the Word of God, freely believed and freely confessed.
4. In order for the Synod to decide now that other statements are scriptural enough to be binding on all its members, every member of the Synod would first have to be persuaded – not by a vote but freely by the Word of God – to redefine the Synod's present confession and to become in effect a new Synod.
5. Meanwhile, voting on a doctrinal statement proves only one thing: not that the statement is scriptural but only that so-and-so many voters believe it is scriptural. Their statement deserves to be honored and upheld, but not to the exclusion of those who differ out of the same

confession of the same Word of God.

6. The reason all matters of doctrine and conscience are to be decided only by the Word of God [EHS: These are the very words of the LCMS constitution] is that this Word, by its very nature as a promise, can be received only by faith. And faith cannot be coerced.
7. To resort to any other means than the good and gracious Word of God – to such means, for instance, as ecclesiastical power – betrays a lack of faith in the Word itself. As if the Word of God were not enough to operate the Church. As if the Church were some secular organization to be run by the will of its members.
8. Because of our faithlessness the Word of God calls us all to repent. But the Word which calls us is not only judgment. Of that we have all received aplenty, more than we can bear. The Word we now need most, and from one another, is the Word of pardon and reassurance. Without that Word of promise repentance remains impossible for us all.
9. It is for the proclaiming of that Word that God Himself has called us into this church, and only He can reject us. That, for the sake of His Son Christ Jesus, we trust He will not do. Therefore we have no intention of leaving this church. And we implore those who share His Word with us, in mutual repentance and forgiveness, to bear with us “the dear, holy Cross,” that together we might make a good confession.

God help us. We can do no other.

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[The following personal note was attached to this page when the researchers found it among Bob's papers: “Ed, This year 1993 marks the 20th anniversary of the attached statement. I have no wish to re-open old wounds. But in a weak (or strong?) moment I

am tempted to reprint the statement-in the Crossings newsletter? Probably not-if only because the statement was so scantily heard originally. Was denkst du? Bob”

I don't remember ever seeing this before, neither the page nor the note. But that may say more about me than about Bob. My hunch is that he did not pass it on to me—for whatever reason—and that's why it was still in his files (cum note). And therefore—Hallelujah!—it still exists for the edification of us all. If those nine theses are “false teaching,” what on earth might “true teaching” be? EHS]

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## **The Wars of Missouri that Led to Seminex. A Retrospective. Part II**

Colleagues,

Here's the second half of the book review begun with last week's posting of ThTh 482.

**Paul A. Zimmermann. A SEMINARY IN CRISIS. THE INSIDE STORY OF THE PREUS FACT FINDING COMMITTEE. St. Louis, CPH. 2007. 153 pp. (plus 290 pp of appendices). Hardcover \$50.**

**Item #3. Martin H. Scharlemann**

With his fixation on the “historical-critical method” [HCM] Paul Zimmermann [PZ] doesn't notice that Scharlemann's “Angst” about



the seminary, when he wrote that letter to President Preus, actually pointed to the systematic theology department and away from Biblical exegesis as PZ chronicles "A Seminary in Crisis."

Even more, he completely ignores—never mentions—that it was Martin Scharlemann who brought HCM to Concordia Seminary when he arrived as Professor of New Testament in 1952. That is the Scharlemann enigma. The one who introduced it to the LCMS became a major critic of those who learned it from him.

For "youngsters" who may be reading this, who know not Scharlemann, here is a brief bio—gleaned from Google:

*"Martin H. Scharlemann (born 28 December 1910 in Nashville, Illinois, died 23 August 1982 in St. Louis, Missouri) did his undergraduate study at Concordia College (St. Paul, Minnesota) and Concordia College (Fort Wayne, Indiana). He graduated from Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) in 1934 and served congregations in Minnesota, Indiana, Missouri and Wisconsin. Scharlemann earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Washington University (St. Louis) in 1936 and 1938, respectively, and a Doctor of Theology degree from Union Theological Seminary (New York City) in 1964. In 1941 he became an Air Force chaplain and served for eleven years. He remained active in the Air Force Reserve until retirement in 1971, attaining the rank of brigadier general. He served on the faculty of Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) from 1952 until 1982 as a professor of exegetical theology. During his tenure he was director of graduate studies from 1954 to 1960 and was acting president for three months in early 1974. For the Missouri Synod he served on the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, the Social Concerns Commission and the Commission on Church Literature. Scharlemann wrote nearly 200 journal articles ranging from military chaplaincy manuals to scholarly theological papers. He also served as an editor for military and church publications." So far Google.*

Until he arrived at Concordia Seminary in 1951, HCM was a no-no with all the profs teaching the Bible. [I know, for they were my teachers.] Martin was the first one to have learned HCM apparently on his own—I wonder where? how?—and judged it to be kosher when he came back to teach at his alma mater. The other Biblical profs whom he joined at the seminary were trained “old school” where “higher criticism” was off limits. Those with earned doctorates had done their grad studies at secular universities in the classical languages, but stayed clear of the dangerous novelties that were aborning in Biblical studies at those non-Missouri graduate schools.

Martin too, freshly graduated from the St. Louis seminary in the midst of the depression (and thus no pastoral “calls” available), followed this path and took his M.A. and Ph.D. at Washington University in St. Louis. His doctoral dissertation was on “The Influence of the Social Changes in Athens on the Development of Greek Tragedy.” He doubtless used HCM with these classical Greek texts. The very title of the dissertation intimates that. But how he came to adopt HCM for studying the Bible—I wonder, I wonder. By the time he got his second doctorate from Union Seminary in New York, explicitly in New Testament studies, he was doing HCM full tilt.

Martin’s first “students” at Concordia Seminary were his own Bible-teaching colleagues for whom HCM had always been the plague. Some he convinced that it was OK—even for Missouri Lutherans—some he didn’t. [I know, for in my last year as a Concordia student Martin was on the scene. I was even a TA (in Hebrew!) for one of the “old school” profs in those days.]

Much wider was the audience Martin attracted among the students. The brightest and best of these students went on to places like Harvard to do doctorates in Biblical studies—where HCM was standard operating procedure. And they went with Martin’s

recommendation. When in the sixties they then came back as new young profs—HCMers all of them—Martin rejoiced. But then something happened. And I could never figure it out and never learned from him what it was.

I was teaching at Valparaiso University during those years and saw Martin only occasionally at family gatherings in St. Louis. [Remember, his wife and my wife were sisters.] He had supported the analogous “new look” in law-gospel Lutheranism at Valpo (a university Missouri-rooted, but not owned) and got me lecture-invitations to places where he had influence. He even took me along—and got me to sign up—to the Society for Biblical Literature and Exegesis, THE club of Biblical scholars, an ecumenical outfit where he was a known figure. When his own troubles in Missouri started bubbling in the early 60s because of his HCM habits, he enlisted my support.

I sent a postcard (only 3 cents then. I’ve still got a few in my Scharlemann file folder with the mimeographed message on it.) to a couple dozen “significant” Missouri Synod folks whom I knew. Here’s the full text: “March 1962. Colleagues, Perhaps you know that the LCMS praesidium [Missouri-ese for the “office” of the synod president, in this case John Behnken] has asked for Martin Scharlemann’s resignation ‘for the good of the synod.’ Since the praesidium functions vicariously for the congregations and individuals who actually ARE the synod, it would be well for the praesidium to hear—via letter or wire—whether the synod thinks this request IS in ITS best interest. Another question on which the praesidium ought to hear synod’s opinion is whether any cause other than convicted heresy or open immorality is ever grounds for resignation. For the Good of Synod please make your opinion known.”

The receivers responded. A number of them sent me copies of their letters to the praesidium in support of Martin.

Ironically, four of these copies carry the signatures of C.Graesser, E.Kalin, J.Damm, A.Weyermann—people at that time pastors and later part of that faculty majority who were on Martin's list of "bad guys" in his letter to Preus calling for the FFC.

Also in my Scharlemann file is Martin's hand-written postcard—green ink! Airmail and thus 5 cents!—to me after my postcard went out: "20 Mar 62. Many, many thanks! The upheaval was so violent that all at once it was decided to call off everything. The new story: that I was only asked to take a leave of absence. The letter I received says: 'We advise you to resign.' This is for your information in case the question comes up. Yours was really an effective card. Regards from all of us! Martin."

But that wasn't the last of it. At the LCMS convention later that summer of 1962 in Cleveland, Martin gave up the fight. Just three months after that green-inked "happy" post card! In the Cleveland 1962 "Convention Bulletin" of June 28, 1962, you find this:

*By a vote of 650 to 17, the convention Tuesday evening voted to "assure Dr. Scharlemann of its (Synod's) forgiveness," following a dramatic afternoon session at which the St. Louis professor read a prepared statement on the floor of the convention in which he said, "I deeply regret and am heartily sorry over the part I played in contributing to the present unrest within Synod." [EHS: Can synods forgive sins? And what about those 17?]In his statement he said, " . . .by the grace of God, I am – as I have been in the past – fully committed to the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures. I hold these Scriptures to be the Word of God in their totality and in all their parts and to be utterly truthful, infallible and completely without error."*

Now if Zimmermann had given us the “inside story” on what happened to Martin between March and June in 1962, for us in the family that would indeed have made the book worth its \$50 price tag. But PZ doesn’t do that, and I was never able to found out from Martin either.

One more thing from my Scharlemann file folder, namely, the sacking of the “faculty majority” for refusal to accept Martin, who had now become our primal accuser, as our Acting President at the seminary after John Tietjen’s removal. The board must have been mad to think that we could accept the leadership of the very one who had “confided” to President Preus that we were false teachers, so seriously false that we “threaten[ed] to deface the Lutheran character of the life and instruction going on at Concordia Seminary.” What could the board possibly have been thinking? And Martin too? But eventually we were given an ultimatum to do just that. Doubtless Missouri’s take on authority (authority “over”) was in the mix: “I’m rightfully in charge. You follow orders.” Here’s how it happened.

Four weeks after Tietjen’s suspension on January 20, 1974—four weeks where we had not followed Martin’s orders—at the next regular meeting of the seminary Board of Control, this resolution was passed and by Martin’s own hand photocopied yet that night and slid under the office door of each of us in the faculty majority.

*You are asked herewith to respond to the resolution below, passed by the Board of Control on the evening of February 17, 1974. You will note that your affirmative reply by noon [tomorrow] will be appreciated. MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN WHEREAS, certain members of the faculty, administrative staff and the guest faculty, since on or about the 22d day of January, 1974, have failed and omitted to carry out their responsibilities and functions as employees under their contracts of employment, and*

WHEREAS, although said members of the faculty, administrative staff and guest faculty whose names are set forth on the schedule attached hereto and made a part hereof, thereafter were requested by the Acting President to resume their said responsibilities and functions, said members of the faculty, the administrative staff and the guest faculty have failed and omitted to comply with such request, and

WHEREAS none of said members of the faculty, administrative staff or guest faculty, has a legal or other right, while continuing in the employment of Concordia Seminary, to not carry out the responsibilities and functions for which he was employed

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

The Board of Control directs the faculty, administrative staff and guest faculty to resume their respective responsibilities and functions as employees under their contracts of employment on February 19th, 1974, that on or before 12 noon February 18, 1974, they signify their assent and agreement in writing to Acting President Scharlemann to so resume their responsibilities and functions as aforesaid and those members of the faculty, administrative staff and guest faculty who fail to comply with the foregoing, having heretofore breached their respective contracts of employment, and they being in continuing breach of their contracts of employment, have terminated their employment which results also in a termination of all of the rights and privileges of their respective positions with Concordia Seminary, including, but not limited to the following:

1. No salaries to be paid to said members of the faculty and the administrative staff for any period subsequent to the 18th day of January, 1974;

2. *No payments be made to any such member of the faculty or of the administrative staff, who provides his own living quarters, for housing allowance or in lieu of rent, for any period subsequent to the 18th day of January, 1974;*
3. *No such member of the faculty who is housed in any of the seminary-owned homes shall be provided with such housing subsequent to February 28, 1974;*
4. *No payments shall be made to such members of the guest faculty for services heretofore rendered by them; and*
5. *All members of the faculty, administrative staff, and guest faculty whose names are set forth on the attached schedule shall remove their personal belongings from offices on the campus heretofore used by them and shall vacate such offices on or before February 28, 1974.*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that these resolutions are without application to Dr. John H. Tietjen, to whom the contractual obligations of Concordia Seminary continue pursuant to by-law 6.79 (d) of the 1973 Handbook.*

Since none of us, the accused, could imagine working with our prosecuting attorney as our leader, by high noon on the next day we all were sacked. And that's when the erroneously called "walkout" happened. Yes, we did "walk" off the campus—and did so with some ceremonial hoopla. But we did so because we'd all been fired. To stick around too long would make us guilty of trespassing—though we did have a nine-day "grace" period before we had to be out of our homes and offices.

[Some say "walkout" refers to our refusal to enter the classroom—under Martin's authority—after the students declared the moratorium. But teach we did, albeit not in the designated seminary classrooms. Instead the classrooms were everywhere any one or more profs and students clustered—in the quad, in student or profs homes, at table and above all in the meetings,

meetings, meetings that happened day in, day out, in the four weeks between Tietjen's suspension (Jan. 20) and Martin's ultimatum (Feb. 18). Many a student later told us: I learned more Lutheran theology in those 4 weeks than in all the rest of my time at the seminary.

If PZ could unravel the mystery of Martin Scharlemann—both at Cleveland in the 60s and at Concordia Seminary in the 70s—that would indeed be a revelation.

Even though Marie and I maintained family-contact with Martin and Dorothy (Marie's sister) until his death in 1982, we never talked about this sticky wicket. After his death Marie asked her sister about this change in Martin. She repeated what he'd told her: "Martin didn't change. It was the rest of the men who did." Another item of shared information from Dorothy: "President Preus never supported Martin after he became acting president." Whether or not for this reason, within a few months after assuming the seminary presidency Martin resigned. My own hunch is that he'd been used, burned, finally burned out.

Ralph Bohlmann, youngest member in the faculty minority, took the helm, a prof in our systematic theology department. PZ introduces him to the reader with this amazingly ingenuous and "innocent" remark that "Ralph Bohlmann, member of the faculty, met a few times" with PZ at the Mark Twain Hotel in St. Louis to help PZ "ask the right questions of faculty members who were reluctant to answer questions forthrightly during the investigation." Question: Is that STASI or what?

A very public Preus loyalist, Bohlmann had ghost-written Preus's "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles." That "Statement" appeared in 1972 and later became the yardstick for measuring the faculty majority's orthodoxy at the New Orleans convention a year later. From the text you could tell that a



seminary insider, not the Synod president, had composed it, and that it was fingering the faculty majority as only an insider could do.

Here, however, is the surprise. In this Bohlmann/Preus "Statement" only one of the three BIG heresies of the faculty majority is the HCM. The other two items of false teaching came from the debate going on within the systematic theology department of which Bohlmann was a member. One issue was the law-gospel axiom for Biblical hermeneutics and the other was the best way to understand Article 6 of the Formula of Concord—itself not unambiguous—concerning "The Third Use of the Law." Though never named, the bad guys here were the five of us systematicians NOT allied with the four systematics profs on Martiin Scharlemann's team. And the worst of those bad guys—prrecisely on these two items—were Bertram and Schroeder, the guys who had brought "Valpo" theology with them when they joined the seminary faculty (Bob in 1963, me in 1971).

Here again Scharlemann's radar was right. It was all about "the Lutheran character of the life and instruction going on at Concordia Seminary." First of all, just what IS this Lutheran character, and then this question: which profs, what teachings, were substantively "threatening to deface" that Lutheran character? The LCMS convention 1973 New Orleans decided that by a 55 to 45 percent vote of the delegates with its (in)famous Resolution 3-09. We bad guys were the threat. The good guys weren't.

#### **4. New Orleans (1973) Resolution 3-09, Missouri's Curse.**

Peace did not come to Missouri with the dismissal of the heretics. Even today, thirty-plus years later, when the false teachers, "not to be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended," have been gone for decades, good guy

and bad guy battles continue. And now the irony is that the one under charge is the synod president, Gerald Kieschnick, the most conservative, Bible-believing, president Missouri has had in ages. Yet he too is under attack from the same alligators of the 1970s—or in some cases, their surviving sons—not so much for the orthodoxy of his doctrine, but for his aberrant practice. I don't know the details. I'm an outsider. But what I hear is that his proposals for mission and lay-ministry diverge, according to the alligators, from "what we've always said and done" in Missouri.

A light bulb went on a few weeks ago about how this never-ending fight inside Missouri might just be "third and fourth generation" consequences of that killer resolution 3-09.

Here's the scenario. I'd just met the LCMS prexy, Gerald Kieschnick (first time ever), at a Bach Society evening event here in town. That night (about 3 a.m.) a light went on. So I shamelessly posted this e-mail to him next morning. It was shortly before the LCMS convention was to open here in town. I haven't received an answer. I'm not holding my breath.

*Dear President Kieschnick, One more item to add to our conversation at the Bach Society annual meeting last evening.*

*Though this was our first face-to-face meeting, you said you knew who I was. I'm guessing that you therefore know how my life was changed at the LCMS convention, New Orleans 1973. From that premise, here's an add-on to our exchange last evening.*

*An 8th commandment Aha! about Missouri's continuing turmoil—and how to bring it to closure.*

- 1. In a few days it will be the 34th anniversary of the New Orleans convention and resolution 3-09.*
- 2. That resolution declared 45 of us teachers at 801 to be*

teaching “false doctrine”—and then quoting the Formula of Concord, that we “cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less excused and defended.”

3. That resolution, when passed as it was, put Missouri on record as officially breaking the 8th commandment. I.e., bearing false witness in a most public way against faithful teachers by calling them false teachers. In Luther’s words that we both memorized from his catechism, the synod did indeed “deceitfully belie, betray, slander, and defame” the neighbor.
4. Even our super-critic Martin Scharlemann (who helped mightily to engineer that resolution) knew that 3-09 was not true, that it was, in fact, false, and thus false witness against us. Here’s *prima facie* evidence: when Martin (my brother-in-law) became acting president of Concordia after Tietjen’s suspension, he tried to convince most all of us 45 to “stay on” under his leadership because we were clearly “not false teachers at all.” Resolution 3-09 was a lie. Martin was admitting it by asking us to stay on.
5. That resolution and the subsequent cleansing of the 45 of us by the seminary board of control action did not bring peace to Missouri. As you well know, since you are yourself now falsely accused by fellow-Missourians, just as we were. Here’s the main point.
6. In the Small Catechism, Chief Part 1, Luther makes it a point to quote the Bible’s own words about commandment-breakers—8th commandment-breakers included—that “God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations.”
7. Missouri’s continuing turmoil, according to this Word of God, will continue, since God Himself continues to “visit” Missouri for that 8th commandment violation of 34 years ago. How can that not be true?

8. *How to stop God being Missouri's critic? You know the answer. It was Jesus' drumbeat: "Repent," and having repented, "trust the Good News."*
9. *So to bring God's own peace back into Missouri, Missouri needs to rescind New Orleans 3-09 just as publicly as it gave that false witness way back then. Not for political reasons, but for pastoral ones, for Missouri's own peace with God. And then to trust the Good News anew.*
10. *I know that you know what Jesus says are the consequences of unrepentance in such passages as Luke 13:5. It's not that we who are still alive (about half) of the original 45 need our names cleared. Christ has already done that. It's Missouri who is in trouble—trouble with God.*
11. *Are you not called to the kingdom for just such a time as this? I think so.*

*Peace and joy!*

*Ed Schroeder*

Back to Zimmermann's book. From his doxology in the final pages about the "blessed outcome" of Preus's leadership and his own FFC you'd think that it's been peachy-keen in Missouri ever since. But it is not yet. Even apart from Kieschnick's alligators, PZ is a bit hasty in claiming the blessing for Missouri. As Bible-believing folks know, blessing is the opposite of curse. It doesn't come so long as the curse persists. False witness brings curse, not blessing. Bible-believers know that. It's scriptural truth. But Bible-believing folks, Missourians included, also know how to get un-cursed. "Repent and believe the Good News."

Almost half of the Seminex faculty, that ancient "faculty majority," has died. The rest of us would gladly have our names cleared of the false witness still on the books in New Orleans 3-09. But it's not we who would be the most benefitted. The

greatest beneficiary of 3-09 repentance would be the LCMS itself. The blessedness Zimmermann claims for God cleansing the heretics years ago (even if it were true) is small potatoes compared with getting God's curse off your back. That's real blessedness. And for Missouri to get there, Paul Zimmermann, there's but one way. Your inside story was, and still is, the wrong way.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. D.v., there will be a Part III—a word from beyond the grave, you could almost say. Just discovered a few days ago among Bob Bertram's papers is the text of his address to the New Orleans Convention 1973. In just one page he says it all. Stay tuned.

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## **The Wars of Missouri that Led to Seminex. A Retrospective.**

Colleagues,

For this week's posting a book review. And then only the first half.

**Paul A. Zimmermann. A SEMINARY IN CRISIS. THE INSIDE STORY OF THE PREUS FACT FINDING COMMITTEE. St. Louis, CPH. 2007. 153 pp. (plus 290 pp of appendices) Hardcover \$50.**

I myself get reviewed in Paul Zimmermann's book. So "caveat

lector.” Reader, beware. This reviewer is not a disinterested bystander to what’s being reviewed. How so? This is PZ’s “inside story” of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod’s “Fact-Finding Committee” of nearly 40 years ago. The facts about me get exposed here. And about lots of other folks too. Well, maybe.

The FFC was one of the major players in the “Wars of Missouri” in the early 1970s. LCMS President Jacob Preus appointed five men to “get the facts” on whether or not non-Missouri doctrine (aka false doctrine)—as was being alleged—was being taught at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. PZ chaired the committee.

The FFC called me in, along with everyone of my seminary colleagues, for a lengthy interview. “We’re just trying to find the facts of what you actually teach and believe.” It was my first year as prof at Concordia in 1971.

So you are hearing a partisan as you read my review of his review of me and the “faculty majority.” For it wasn’t the entire faculty that was suspect of false doctrine, it was only the “faculty majority.” That was some 45 of us. The “faculty minority,” five colleagues who had coalesced already before I got to “the sem,” were also interviewed, but they were considered kosher in advance.

These five had earlier given public voice to their suspicion about what the “faculty majority” were doing. One of the five, Martin Scharlemann, had actually triggered the FFC into existence by a letter to LCMS President Preus (April 9, 1970) informing him of ten (10) aberrations “prevalent” at the seminary. He concluded “May I be so presumptuous, therefore, as to suggest that a competent committee of inquiry be created to look into the matters that threaten to deface the Lutheran character of the life and instruction going on at Concordia Seminary?”

Martin Scharlemann was my brother-in-law. His wife Dorothy and my wife Marie were sisters. More about Martin below.

PZ offers his inside story of a seminary in crisis, viewing that past history and his own involvement in it with what he thinks are untinted eyeglasses. But through my lenses his cantus firmus is good guys vs. bad guys.

Good guys were Preus, Scharlemann, PZ's own FFC, the faculty minority, Marquart, Klug, and other "sound" Missouri theologians, plus synodical convention delegates (loyal to the Bible and to what Missouri had always taught) who delivered the narrow majorities needed to bring in the guilty verdict on the accused.

Bad guys were the liberals in Missouri (who deceptively called themselves "moderates"), all those seminary profs using the "historical-critical method" when they taught the Bible, Concordia president Tietjen who didn't discipline such profs, Caemmerer, Bertram, Lueking, Frey, plus the 8 disloyal district presidents who accepted Seminex graduates into their own Missouri Synod districts, and convention delegates already led astray by such pastors and teachers.

The citations below from the closing paragraphs give the melody of the cantus firmus of the entire volume:

*Bad Guys: "Once again the liberals resorted in (sic) judgmental and abusive language rather than present reasoned arguments for their positions." (p134) Good guy, super good guy: "Looking back over those difficult days, it is evident that President Preus followed a course that demonstrated Christian love and patience, coupled with a firm resolve to preserve pure Scripture doctrine and practice." (p133)*

*"The synodical president had a warm heart and a loving nature,*

*but he had felt compelled for the good of the Synod and by fidelity to God and His Word to carry out his duties.” (p133)*

*“As we once again thank God for the dedicated, wise, and Scripture-based leadership Dr. Preus gave the Synod.” (p144)*

Chapter after chapter offer variations on this good guy/bad guy melody–point and counterpoint–through the book’s ten chapters.

And, no surprise, God showered his blessings and approval on the good guys.

From the foreword by the only other survivor of the FFC, Karl Barth:

*“The activity of the FFC . . . under God’s grace [was] a\_\_blessing\_\_to the LCMS.”*

PZ’s own preface:

*[This book is] ” . . . a history of how the doctrinal problems slowly emerged and grew, how Dr. J.A.O.Preus was elected to the presidency of the Synod, and the steps he took that, under God’s\_\_blessing,\_\_eventually led to a solution of the problems.”*

PZ ‘s final words:

*“In those dark days when it seemed as if a solution to the Synod’s problems could never be achieved, the Lord sustained His Church and His Spirit through His divine Word led the LCMS to a\_\_blessed\_\_outcome.”(143).*

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## A Couple of Items:

1. Historical Critical Method, was that THE Issue?The villain throughout PZ's "inside story" is the "historical-critical method" [HCM] applied to teaching the Bible—and ascribed by PZ not only to the profs in the OT and NT departments at Concordia, but most often to all 45 of us in the faculty majority, four-fifths of whom were in other teaching fields.

What is HCM? Here's what Wikipedia says:

*"The historical-critical method is a broad term that includes numerous methodologies and strategies for understanding ancient manuscripts, especially the Bible. The historical critical method studies the biblical text in the same fashion as it would study any other ancient text and comments upon it as an expression of human discourse."*

For pious ears in Missouri that sounds like reading the Bible as (merely? mostly?) the word of man, and definitely NOT as 100% the Word of God, When HCM practitioners responded: "No, no, no. The Bible is both—Word of God AND word of man—like Jesus, fully divine and fully human," that sounded contrary to "what we've always said." If the "human side" of the book of Jonah signalled that it was a parable, Word of God in parable format, or again, if the "human side" of the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy) showed four distinct and different retellings of God's work and word in primeval times, all woven into one—for many that was just too much. Before long you could hear the cry from the ramparts: "They're taking our Bible away from us!"

But I don't think HCM was what the fight was about. Though

that was what PZ thinks—and lots of folks at that time did too. But Martin Scharlemann, good guy for PZ, brother-in-law for me (eventually my accuser and the seminary's acting president who signed my letter of dismissal), was more on target in that 1970 letter to Preus complaining about the faculty majority and calling Preus to set up the FFC. Martin said that we bad guys “threaten to deface the Lutheran character of the life and instruction going on at Concordia Seminary.”

Martin had it right. That was THE battleground: What does it mean to be Lutheran in “life and instruction”—in ethics and doctrine?

Our critics repeatedly said: “Lutheran is ‘what we’ve always said’ in Missouri. You guys are saying something different, though you call it Lutheran. But any teaching different from ‘what we’ve always said’ is – by definition –not Lutheran. You guys fail the test.” The majority of delegates at the Synod convention (New Orleans 1973) agreed by a 574-to-451 vote. We bad guys were not Lutheran in ethics and doctrine. PZ’s FFC had made that perfectly clear. The actual text of that resolution was even sterner than just “not Lutheran.” We were “not to be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended.” All 45 of us in one fell swoop.

PZ and many (most?) of the LCMS grass-roots, pastors and people—and the public media, both churchly and secular—thought the “something different” was coming from the folks in the Biblical departments. True enough. The HCM was helping them find “even more” goodies in the Bible than what Missouri had always taught.

But that itself does not YET make anything UN-Lutheran.

The yardstick for what is/is not Lutheran is in the Lutheran Confessions. It wasn't the Bible profs who were teaching those courses. It was guys like me and Bertram and our 8 other colleagues in the department of Systematic Theology. Our calling was teaching doctrine, ethics, and the Lutheran Confessions. So it was in OUR department, not the Bible departments, that what Scharlemann pinpointed was the issue.

What constitutes the "Lutheran character" of anything? That was the real question. But most of us on the faculty, I think in retrospect, possibly even we systematic profs ourselves at first, didn't catch on. HCM was constantly in the spotlight. But the fundamental issue was elsewhere. The battle was about the heart of Reformation theology, Luther's "Aha!" about the Gospel, not about the historical-critical method.

It became much clearer, so I think, when the "faculty minority" coalesced and 4 of the 5 of them were from our systematics department! The only Bible prof was Scharlemann.

2. So what was it like in our department of systematic theology? There were actually 3 different positions within the systematics dept among our colleagues, three different readings of the Lutheran Confessions, for answering what is "the Lutheran character of the life and instruction [that was to be] going on at Concordia Seminary." One way of describing them is to say "three different sets of lenses" for reading the Lutheran Confessions.

1. One set was that used by the 4 colleagues linked with Scharlemann in the faculty minority, R.Bohlmann, R.Klann, R.Preus and L.Wunderlich. Those colleagues used the lenses of Lutheran orthodoxy

(17th/18th century theologians—Missouri's own heritage) to read the confessions. Lutheran orthodoxy had a doctrine of the authority of scripture, its verbal inspiration and inerrancy. Lutheran theologians of that 17th/18th century era, pressured by the continuing claims of Rome to have the Christ-appointed papacy as their authority, built their own contra-papal authority model on the Bible itself, and worked out the details that brought in the language of verbal inspiration, inerrancy, etc. Clearly an authority that was actually God's own Word superseded a "human" pope even if he did have apostolic succession for his credentials. So Lutherans had a better authority than the papists did. Lutheran doctrine was safe since it all came from God's own source and not some patently human pontiff. Lutheran orthodoxy professed its solid commitment to the Reformation heritage. So its spokesmen sought to show that you could find such signals about Biblical authority (if not explicit statements) in the 16th century Lutheran confessions too. And in any case the Lutheran Confessions surely didn't deny such teaching about the Bible.

2. Second was using Luther's own theology as your lenses for the confessions. R. Bertram, H. Bouman, E. Lueker, E. Schroeder and A. Weyermann were of that persuasion. That perspective parsed the issue of Biblical authority—you guessed it—by running it through the law-and-gospel sieve. Law authority and gospel authority are different sorts of authority. Even Jesus says so. See Matthew 20:20ff, for evidence.

1. God's law comes with its own distinct

authority module. It's top down—overling/underling in format. It's authority "over." Obey and get the benefits; disobey and reap the consequences. Even salvation, though surely by grace alone, got tangled up in this in Missouri. "IF you believe all that the Bible teaches (sure, with Jesus as the cornerstone, but all the other stuff as well), you will be saved. IF you fudge on some scriptural teachings (i.e., that whole laundry list that the FFC trotted out in our interviews: 6-day creation, Jonah, Mosaic authorship, OT prophecies, only 'one' Isaiah), then maybe not." Missouri's hangup on authority—both for the Bible and for LCMS church life—was its inability to get away from this law-grounded authority paradigm. [Mary Todd's book, *Authority Vested: A Story of Identity and Change in the LCMS*, spells out the details. She says she's working on a sequel, the LCMS and Seminex.] President Preus put it this way: "Finally someone has to decide what is/is not true doctrine in the LCMS" and he called on convention delegates to carry out that task. Question: does this sound more like Rome or like Wittenberg?

2. A gospel-grounded paradigm for authority is the upside-down pyramid Jesus presents in Matt. 20. Authority from "under." Non-coercive. Where the authority figure does not impose his will, but "lays down his life as a ransom" for the underling. That Christic "promissory" authority coupled with the mercy "offer," not coercion, was just as embattled

in Missouri at that time as it was in Jesus' own day—and as it is today even and especially in the churches. So for Biblical authority, the “pressure” to trust it does not come from its divine character (you’ve just GOTTA believe it) but from its winsome Gospel (here’s something good and new that you GET TO believe). The Good News itself commends folks to trust it.

3. Third was the unique stance of dear A.C. Piepkorn. With a pax on both your houses to the rest of us in the systematics department, his was a third way. He knew Lutheran orthodoxy inside out, but also knew its slide away from the classic confessions. And, gentle soul that he was, he was always a little leary of Blessed Martin’s occasional rambunctiousness—also in theology. When colleagues like Bob Bertram would refer to the law-gospel distinction “the Lutheran hermeneutic for Scripture,” in department meetings, ACP would whisper, 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.”

4. With reference to the debate whether the Bible or the Gospel comes first in authority, the 4 colleagues of the faculty minority reasoned: In order to have a trustable Gospel, you have to be sure that the Bible that proclaims it is itself trustable (=inspired by God and inerrant). That was what we “always said” in Missouri. But that meant that trust in the Bible is a prior trust, a prerequisite, that you’ve just “gotta” have before you can trust the Bible’s Gospel. It makes perfect sense. However, such a prior trust is necessarily grounded on trusting something else than THE Gospel itself, something you got to trust (=law’s sort of authority) in order to be able to trust the Gospel. But prerequisites of any sort (which are always law, no matter how sweetly you perfume them) before you can trust the Gospel, is analogous to requiring circumcision before you can become a Christian, isn’t it? And the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 made it perfectly clear that THAT was a no-no. It’s got to be the other way around with Bible and Gospel. Trusting the gospel comes first, honoring the Scriptures is subordinate.

That’s what the other bunch of us said. Requiring a prior trust before you can trust the Gospel is fudging on the trust issue. And trust is faith. The proclaimed Gospel is in itself winsome and self-authorizing. Once trusting the Gospel you “search the scriptures, for in them you seek to hear [more] of the Gospel offer of eternal life.” And you already know that that eternal life comes as these scriptures “testify of Christ.”

5. That was Luther's claim of "Christum treiben" [whatever urges Christ] as his axiom for reading the Bible, spelled out in his Introduction to his new translation of the NT in 1522. He was not specifically dealing with the authority term here, but with its cognate, the term "apostolic." "Apostolic" (and therefore authoritative), he said, is anything that does "Christum treiben"—even, as Luther brashly put it, even if Pilate, Herod or Judas wrote the "Christum treiben" text.

I shan't expand on this any more. If you've been reading these Crossings posts for any length of time, you've seen this Gospel-first authority proposal spelled out week after week both in the Text Studies and the ThTh postings.

#### Conclusion:

It was a shibboleth in Missouri (this time, a good one from the other center of the ellipse of Missouri's schizophrenic heritage) that the Gospel of justification by faith alone, that is, justification only by trusting the Gospel, is the "foundation stone on which the church stands or falls." That mantra is but a variation on the "Christum treiben" axiom for Biblical authority. That's what our segment of the systematics department was hustling among our colleagues and in our classroom teaching. So who really was threatening "the Lutheran character of the life and instruction at Concordia Seminary?" Who really was teaching "what Missouri has always taught"?

That simply cannot be answered by convention votes. Zimmermann with his "inside story" thinks it can. Even more so, he says, it came out as a blessing. But can that be true? A Christian community cherishing an authority model that is "under the law" is itself NOT under blessing, but "under the curse." The apostle whose name Paul Zimmermann bears goes almost ballistic in trying



to convince Galatian Christians that “under law” and “under curse” are Siamese twins. What was true in Galatia is true anywhere else in the world. Also in Missouri.

[To be continued. Next time: Item #3 – Scharlemann. Item #4 – New Orleans Resolution 3-09, Missouri’s Curse.]

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## Memento Mori at Home

Colleagues,

We’re just back from “the ranch,” the Schroeder family farm in Coal Valley, Illinois, where the clan gathered to bury my farmer brother Bob, third in the line of us seven sibs, the first to die. Age 74. Brain tumor. Diagnosed a couple months ago. Glioblastoma multiforme, from which none recover, we are told.

Besides being a highly competent farmer, Bob early on became the grave-digger at various cemeteries in this northwest corner of rural Illinois. Being a farmer-son of my farmer-father he kept records of everything—hog prices, corn prices, weather, Chicago Cub games—and, of course, the graves he dug. For 35 years—1962-97. Total 1740. Fifty per year for 35 yrs. All dug with a hand spade. No machines. In his prime, his kids told us, he could do one in 45 minutes—and then get back to cultivating corn or combining grain. He was a local superstar in many ways.

Bob’s the only one of the 7 of us who didn’t go to college. Just out of high school, he knew he wanted to be a farmer. He married at 19 and got started on his calling. One of my brothers

maintains Bob was the smartest of us all. Though he never claimed that, it could be. None of us doubts that he was the richest of us kids. ['Course, with farm land prices nowadays in his neighborhood, you need only 200 acres to be a millionaire.] After Thursday visitation (some 800 signed the book), Friday church-overflowing funeral (St. Paul's Luth. ELCA in Orion, IL), Saturday clan lunch for story-telling, we concluded by all of us digging and then planting a "Bob" tree (sugar maple, big one, 15 ft tall) on the home-place along Schroeder Road between the two now quite tall evergreens planted for our Mom and Dad, who died in '74 and '87. There's space twixt those conifers for the rest of us.

So right now we have a close-to-home memento mori before us—but not without hope.

Even if it was a "good" funeral, it was not quite according to the specs Bob had outlined in one of his records. E.g., I know that he wanted "Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me" as one of the funeral hymns. For reasons unknown to me it didn't happen. When Marie and I last visited him two weeks before he died, he specified this hymn again for his final liturgy. "Dad picked this hymn for his own funeral, you may remember," he said. That was 20 years ago. "So if even Dad needed that hymn, I do too." We didn't push to ask him what lay behind this wish. All seven of us sibs know some rascally items about each other. But maybe for him it was big stuff—wrestling with his own unfaith. Or doubt. Or despair. He didn't elaborate. "If even Dad needed that hymn, I do too." Too bad it didn't make the cut for the actual funeral service. I think it was the public faith-confession he wanted all to hear as his last will and testament.

When he said that at our final visit, Marie and I popped open his hymnal (shelved along with his record books) in the farm

kitchen and we sang it. Coupled as it is with the tune of "Go to Dark Gethsemane," it sounds more morose than its text really is. With a more sprightly tune the Easter accents in the hymn text might surface more obviously, as they do in the "funeral" theology of St. Paul who coined the "chief of sinners" phrase for himself.

That was the last faith-statement we heard from Bob. Since it didn't turn up as his own confession at the funeral, I'm going to give it publicity here.

Chief of sinners though I be,  
Jesus shed his blood for me.  
Died that I might live on high,  
Lives that I might never die.  
As the branch is to the vine,  
I am His, and he is mine.  
Oh, the height of Jesus' love!  
Higher than the heavens above,  
Deeper than the depths of sea,  
Lasting as eternity.  
Love that found me—wondrous thought—  
Found me when I sought him not.

Only Jesus can impart  
Balm to heal the stricken heart,  
Peace that flows from sin forgiven,  
Joy that lifts the soul to heaven,  
Faith and hope to walk with God  
In the way that Enoch trod.

Chief of sinners though I be,  
Christ is All-in-All to me;  
All my wants to him are known,  
All my sorrows are his own.

He sustains the hidden life  
Safe with him from earthly strife.

O my Savior, help afford  
By your Spirit and your Word!  
When my wayward heart would stray,  
Keep me in the narrow way;  
Grace in time of need supply  
While I live and when I die.

The conversation during the weekend, when it sought to be explicitly religious, was seldom as gospel-gutsy as New Testament “funeral” rhetoric. Plato with his immortality of the soul got more footnotes than Saints Paul or John—or even Jesus. Happily the funeral sermon from the pastor of St. Paul’s Lutheran did stick to the Johannine text. But the public rhetoric was not Gospelsy, not even Biblical. Instead of the closed eyes and cosmetically enhanced face of the corpse we all viewed in the casket, Bob was (really) open-eyed looking down on us from heaven, sending messages and waiting for us to join him. He was already there in heaven, not here before us in this box. Even without being raised on the last day he’d already conquered death. It was a done deal.

I’ve read again some of the NT sections on this topic (John 6, 11, 14; I Cor. 15; I Thessalonians) to get a second opinion, and then to reflect on how this NT vocabulary might replace Plato’s for Christian talk at funerals.

Some observations:

The rhetoric is notably ALWAYS in the future tense.  
John 6. Whoever “eats and drinks” Jesus WILL live forever [and] already HAS eternal life (namely, God’s own life-that-lasts, i.e., life that is everlasting, so it WILL last forever).

John 11. Jesus IS resurrection and life. "Whoever believes in me, even though they die, WILL live."

John 14. "In my father's house are many dwelling places." Jesus "goes" (to the cross) to "prepare a place for you." But Christ-trusters don't automatically move there when they breathe their last. "'I WILL come again and WILL take you to myself, so that where I am you MAY be also."

I Corinthians 15. "All WILL be made alive in Christ." "We WILL also bear the image of the man of heaven." "The trumpet WILL sound, and the dead WILL be raised imperishable, and we WILL be changed."

I Thessalonians 4. "Through Jesus God WILL bring with him those who have died." "For the Lord himself . . . WILL descend from heaven and the dead in Christ WILL rise first . . . and so we WILL be with the Lord forever."

That's why "hope" figures in in Christian "funeral talk" (I Cor. 15:19; I Thess. 1:3, 2:19, 4:13, 5:8). Hope is always a "future-tense" verb. Hope is faith focused on the future—things that are not yet, but are part of the package of Christ's promise.

Every WILL reference is a Christ-connected assertion—and a link to Jesus' own resurrection. "If Christ be not raised," all such upbeat WILL talk is "vain"—in the literal meaning of the term—empty.

Could this NT way of funeral conversation actually become our own? Why not? Might it be something like this?

The only Bob we knew is in that box. He's no longer breathing. From his confession we often heard that he claimed Christ-connection. The water-and-the-word of his baptism initiated it. What's not patent "in the box" as we look at him—as it was when he was still breathing—is his Christ-connection. His death doesn't undo that. 'Fact is, it's another step along Bob's

baptismal way.

That Christ-connection doesn't transplant the "real" Bob into the heavenly mansions, but entails a promise that Bob has more biography coming. As Bob Bertram liked to say, Christ-connected dying is "death, comma" not "death, period." There is more to come.

But we don't expect it to come for Bob until the Architect of Resurrection Himself comes again and touches what's in the box. So we don't imagine him "enjoying" heaven as we bury him. If New Testament Christ-confessors NEVER do that, what grounds do we have for doing so?

Instead we talk about Bob's promising future, not his current celestial home address.

And to do so we'll have to talk about Bob together with the Resurrection Architect, baked together "in one cake" as Luther liked to say.

Sure, it's all hope, but Christian hope is not wishful thinking blowing in the wind. Back to Bob Bertram. He once confected a Crossings semester-long course, "Crossings from Ephesians: Hope Needs Success." And the "success" that grounds Christian hope is God's "Eastering Jesus," as BB liked to say. [There is a macabre link between Bob Bertram and my brother Bob. Glioblastoma multiforme was death's instrument for both of them.]

It's all linked to "if Christ be raised or not." If not, then it is "death, period." If yes, then there is more coming after the comma.

Word has gotten back to us that Jaroslav Pelikan on his deathbed not long ago told his son: "If Christ was raised, then nothing else matters. And if Christ was not raised, then nothing else matters."

Back to last week, up at the ranch—

We took along to the funeral the 7-foot long resurrection banner we have, an artifact from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, just

before Seminex. A student seminary couple, Ann and Mike Brecke, created it in the early 1970s just as the storm clouds of the War of Missouri were gathering. Its combination of text and textiles is stunning. The Breckes created it for the Concordia Seminary chapel during the Easter season, and one day when it was my turn to give the homily, I used their banner as my preaching text. Possibly because of that, they showed up at my office door and gave it to me.

We frequently offer its witness for display, sometimes during a procession, when we attend funerals. So last week it stood in the chancel at St. Paul's Lutheran in Orion, Illinois. You can see it for yourself at this URL: <http://crossings.typepad.com/photos/banner/> [Make sure you click on each of the small photos to see the full banner. The words are clearer in the "with flash" photo.]

The Breckes chose one of the feistiest Christian funeral hymns there is for their text, "Jesus meine Zuversicht." [Its usual English rendering, "Jesus Christ, my sure defense," is not quite right. "Zuversicht" means "confidence."] In Otto von Schwerin's original, this hymn has ten (sic!) stanzas. The banner text is stanza nine, which sadly no longer appears in the last two ELCA hymnals, LBW and ELW. Back in the 70s the Breckes and all of us "Missourians" were using TLH, The Lutheran Hymnal, and there we had all ten verses.

The entire hymn matches the three rubrics I gleaned from the NT above: future tense, hope-filled, and grounded in Christ's own resurrection. I suggest that you access the photo and then read the two verses copied here: verse one (ELW) and the banner verse, number nine (TLH). If you get a bit "cross"-eyed going back and forth, that's not all bad.

Jesus lives, my sure defense

and my everlasting Savior!  
Knowing this, my confidence  
rests in hope and will not waver,  
Though the night of death be fraught  
still with many an anxious thought.  
Laugh to scorn the gloomy grave  
and at death no longer tremble;  
He, the Lord, who came to save  
will at last his own assemble.  
We will rise our Lord to meet  
treading death beneath our feet.

Plato farewell! You are too platitudinous. [Webster: banal, trite, stale] This Good News is really Good and genuinely New. Since Christ IS risen from the dead, that's all that matters. The banner proclaims it in more ways than I can.

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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## **ThTh Annual Report to the Crossings Board of Directors**

Colleagues,

OK, so I'm lazy here toward the end of August—and I'm double-dipping. The annual meeting of the Crossings board of directors happens this weekend here in St. Louis. Though long retired from the board I'm asked to give an account of my stewardship with Thursday Theology for the past year. Since I'll be presenting this report to them on this very Thursday,



I might as well pass it on to the 675 of you (latest statistics) on the Crossings listserve and call it this week's ThTh post. Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **Crossings Board Meeting**

### **August 23-24, 2007**

### **St. Louis MO**

#### *"Thursday Theology" Report*

- 1. Thursday Theology postings have appeared weekly since last year's board meeting. Today's is #480.*
- 2. In the 52 ThTh posts since last year's board meeting, 30 were from my hand, 22 came from 16 different guest contributors—D Ahl, M Averyt, G Barker, J Burce (2), N. Dietz, B Heinrich, M Hoy (2), T Hoyer (2), S Krueger (2), D Lueking, R Morgan (2), C Nesson, F Niedner (2), D Schedler, G Simpson, B Yancey. If there are no glitches, ThTh #500 should appear 20 weeks from today on January 10, 2008.*
- 3. The postings often generate more work. Frequently after confecting a Thursday essay, I wind up with requests from the readers for theological counselling/consultation. APPENDIX I below gives some examples.*
- 4. There continues to be no overarching plan, no "mission-statement," for ThTh postings. The editor's whimsy and theological predilections (and occasional dyspepsia?), plus random items that cross his desk and attract his interest, determine what the Thursday product will be. Ad hocery prevails. What this bodes for the long (or short)*

*range future of ThTh is in the board's hands.*

*5. Nostalgia and a bit of history.*

- 1. The first ever Sabbatheology was posted to a handful of Crossings folks on Saturday January 27, 1996. There was no listserve, just names from my email address book of folks I thought might be interested. How and when the listserve came to be I no longer remember. That first Sabbatheology was a "ThTh" sort of Schroeder's musings (or mumblings) about something or other. Marie says she has it on a floppy disc somewhere, so I'll see if I can find it and copy it below.*
- 2. Before long the ST postings became Crossings-style 6-step text studies for the Sunday Gospels in the Revised Standard Lectionary—posted 8 days before the specific Sunday. Yours truly continued such postings until SabbTheol #88—on November 15, 1997. Robin Morgan and Mike Hoy (Mike then still dean at Capital University's campus in Dayton OH) took over as ST producers. A short while thereafter I had heart surgery to replace a defective aortic valve. Robin and Mike began their ST commitment with Advent I (Year of Luke) on November 22, 1997.*
- 3. On May 14, 1998 (a Thursday)—for reasons no longer clear to me—Thursday Theology #1 appeared. If you wish to see it, it's archived on our website under the ThTh listings.*
- 4. See APPENDIX II for the text of the first issue of "Sabbath Theology" (initially two words, but before long elided to "Sabbatheology"). It is not archived on our website. The 1996 posts archived there are "Lectionary Text Studies," and ST #1 doesn't fit under that rubric.*

*Respectfully submitted,*

Edward H. Schroeder  
August 23, 2007

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## **APPENDIX I**

### **Requests for Theological Consultation**

*Sample #1 from an ELCA teaching theologian*

*Date: Wed, 18 Jul 2007 Dear Ed,  
First, I want to thank you for the way you continue to teach and inspire, including many of us out here whom you have never met. I read your Thursday theology #473 (July 5, 2007) with much interest for a couple of reasons . . . . The real reason I'm writing is because I am intrigued by the connection you (and Bob Bertram) are making between promise and mission. And, if you're willing, I would very much appreciate a conversation with you about it.*

*Sample #2 from a scientist in the North Carolina University Triangle*

*Date: Mon, July 9, 2007 Ed, I need a theological consult. Yesterday afternoon my wife and I got into a discussion of intelligent design as we were driving back from the beach. Actually, it may have been more of a diatribe on my part. Saturday afternoon, the CSPAN-2 featured a lecture by Michael Behe (biochemist and advocate of intelligent design). My initial take on the whole ID movement (a couple of years ago) was that it smacked of idolatry. In my simplicity, I see God as infinite and man as finite. Thus, it is impossible for man to know the mind of God. Yet, when the ID advocates are trying to find foot prints to prove that God created the universe, they seem a lot like Adam and Eve in the Garden of*

*Eden trying to discern the mind of God. To me, knowledge that God created heaven and earth is a gift of faith, not something discernable by scientific method. Do you have any thoughts on this matter?*

*Sample #3 from a Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod pastor*

*Wed, August 15, 2007 I'm a Seminex grad of 1978 and LCMS pastor. I need help. I am being accused by a fellow Missouri pastor because a choir from a Pentecostal church sang in our congregation. This other pastor is telling me that because this church is 'heterodox,' I allowed false doctrine to be taught through the songs. In my last two meetings with him when we were supposed to "dialogue" about our beliefs, he spent at least 40 minutes "lecturing" me. He is very angry with the whole LCMS, the synod president, our circuit and with the teachings at our Lutheran school. He said and I quote "The LCMS is the only true visible church on earth. That is the LCMS that is doctrinally pure and orthodox." Do you have any counsel for your one-time student?*

*Sample #4 From out of the blue*

*Sun, 15 July 2007 My name is . . . and I am trying to get in touch with Dr. Schroeder. I am an Episcopal Minister who has been dramatically influenced by the work of Werner Elert, so much so that my wife and I have moved to Berlin in order to learn German, and hopefully pursue a PhD either here or in the states. As someone who argues along an "Elertian" understanding of the Law, I have found myself in an interesting middle position between those who follow Robert Gagnon's theology on one hand, and those who reject the reality of the Law all together (which is most of my church). I was introduced to this theology through the teaching/works*

of Dr. Paul Zahl, former dean of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry. Through his works, Elert's, Forde and the like, I have had my whole paradigm re-ordered. Because our church is currently in the midst of crisis re: homosexuality, I would love to "talk" to Dr. Schroeder about how the Law/Gospel distinction can be understood in light of the current debates.

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## **APPENDIX II**

### **The First Ever Sabbatheology**

Jan. 27, 1996

Sabbath Theology #1

Just to put a few more bits/bytes into the message to make the whole effort worthwhile, this bon mot: German researchers attempted to uncover what specific behaviors contributed to people's longevity and success. They found that those who kiss their spouses every morning have fewer accidents on their way to work. In addition, "good morning kissers are absent [from work?] less often due to illness than non-kissers. And more amazing, kissers earn from 20% to 30% more and live almost 4 years longer!" A word to the wise...

And then a snippet from the good Jebbies at Georgetown U. From the WoodstockReport (Dec.1995). Ray Kemp, S.J., says in the interview of his "Preaching the Just Word" seminars: "One preacher said to us in a recent retreat, 'I have been aware for the last ten years that I have been preaching pious platitudes. WHAT I HAVE REALIZED THIS WEEK IS THAT MY OWN HEART AND SOUL HAVE NOT BEEN CONVERTED TO A RENEWED APPRECIATION OF THE GOSPEL. God is seeking to work in the world today through the instrumentality of the Church and through the instrumentality of, God help us, my own preaching.'"

*How about this as an axiom? No one will do a very good job of preaching THE Gospel until the Gospel has been Good News to his/her own heart and soul. And for us Augsburg Catholic types, this variation on that theme: No one will ever rightly distinguish law from gospel until they have been struck in person (in heart and soul) with said Good News and thus moved—first internally for their own selves—from law to gospel. Knowing the difference is a HEART's experience, not a mind's comprehension. That's what Paul was talking about, wasn't he, when in the opening chapters of Romans he says the Gentiles did have knowledge of God, but did not acknowledge God. That pun, gnosis vs. epignosis, designates two differing venues, different locations, for the Aha! about God, about Gospel, about the Gospel's quantum difference from the law.*

*To one of my e-mail bemoanings from Australia in 1994 about my students' opaqueness in catching what the Good News was all about, Bob Schultz told me that same thing in other terms. It now comes home to me again as I hear of the lousy (non-Gospel, anti-Gospel) preaching of two dear friends, former students. The Seminex-alum reporting this to me asked: "How can that be? They were in the same classes with the rest of us, and it got through to me!" The obvious answer is: It did get into their heads; it didn't get into their lives, their own personal histories. Now that I've composed this much, I'll cc. the message to a passel of folks, esp. Bob Schultz, and others to whom I doubtless owe letters. Cheers y'all!*

*So much for Sabbath-day theology on 1.27.96.*

*Peace & Joy!*

*Ed*