

# An (Un)LUTHERAN View of the Kingdom of God

Colleagues,

Those of you affiliated with the ELCA probably now have in hand the June issue of THE LUTHERAN, the monthly magazine of our denomination. Playing on the prose of Luther's drum-beat question in the Small Catechism, the magazine cover hypes the lead article this way: "Kingdom of God: What does this mean?"

But after that pro forma nod to Luther on the cover, you find nary a snippet of Luther's theology of the KoG in the article itself. Author Marcus J. Borg, a once-upon-a-time Lutheran (so I've heard), and now a major guru in the Jesus Seminar movement, shows that he has no clue of Luther's distinctive theology of the KoG—or if he does, he's "agin it," and he's out to replace it. Borg's full text is available at [http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=6498](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=6498) so you can see for yourself.

And that in our magazine billing itself as THE LUTHERAN. Truth-in-advertising? Someone was asleep at the switch. [And the editor is a good guy. Even comes from my PCB—predecessor church body. Even closer to home, my brother was his Lutheran High School teacher.]

So I've composed this letter to the editor—and sent it. If only for reasons of length, it'll never make it into the Letters section of subsequent issues. So you get it here.

*Dear Editor, I think you did us a disservice with Marcus Borg's piece "Jesus & the Kingdom of God," June 2007. Worse still, Borg does that KoG a disservice, even though he is speaking the*

party line of much of today's scholarly theological crowd. Here's his core assertion: "The KoG is what life would be like on earth if God were king and the rulers of this world were not."

As winsome as that may sound, Borg couldn't be more wrong. At least for THE Lutheran. That mantra was verbatim (though in German) the motto of Thomas Muentzer, a once-upon-a-time student of Luther who apparently skipped the lecture on KoG, and also missed the Wittenberg "Aha!" about the Gospel itself. So in the mid-1520s right under Luther's nose Muentzer set about to remove the rulers of his part of the world and replace them with (his version of) "what life would be like on earth if God were king"—and TM, of course, his viceroy. It didn't work. No surprise, the rulers wouldn't abdicate willingly, and they had more swords than Muentzer did, though he did believe that swords would work to make KoG happen. Borg doesn't call for such militarism, but his mantra is the same. It's not the KoG that the Bible links to the word "Jesus."

You might say that it's a debate about theological geography. What is the venue, the locale, the turf, where KoG happens or doesn't happen? Is it internal in human hearts, where we do our fearing, loving and trusting? Or is it not in those hearts, but out in the public arena, in the world of human societies where "rulers of this world" do their ruling? Luther heard the NT speaking only of the former when it spoke of KoG. Borg and company choose the latter. Right off the top—were they contemporaries—Luther would ask Borg: "What makes you think that the rulers of this world are not God-appointees—for just that task, ruling this world? Where did you get that idea? Surely not in any of my lectures." And he'd likely also ask Borg: "If KoG really is what you say it is, then Jesus was a total failure. For by the time of his departure the rulers of this world were just as much in charge as they were the day he

was born. If there was no change there, then the KoG did NOT happen. Jesus and the kingdom of God were a total flop.”

As always for Lutherans, the issue is: what is the GOSPEL? So here, what is the Good News called Kingdom of God that arrives in Jesus? Borg’s answer is the mantra that is the current shibboleth among theologians and among churches (ELCA often included): “a world of peace and justice.” That pair of terms is NEVER predicated to KoG anywhere in the NT. Borg wants us to believe that the KoG is “about who rules the world and how.” “KoG is God’s dream for the earth.” There is NO NT support for that claim. It’s Borg’s fabrication—and that of dozens (hundreds?) of others. It’s fiction. And zillions believe it, not only in the ELCA.

Two followup article come right after Borg’s in the June issue. The second of the two is a study guide where—of all things—Robert Blezard (and he must know that he’s contradicting Borg big time) takes us to the Book of Concord to quote Melanchthon and Luther on the topic. Hallelujah! They do NOT say what Borg says as they spec out the KoG. Blezard’s full text is at [http://www.thelutheran.org/article/study\\_guide.cfm?sg\\_id=234](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/study_guide.cfm?sg_id=234)

Melanchthon and Luther say perfectly clearly that KoG is what Jesus says and does and goes through so that faith can happen, so that folks may trust God, where previously they didn’t do so. A.k.a., the forgiveness of sins. In contemporary lingo KoG is always an event on the God-human interface, NOT the human-to-human interface. It’s an event in our relationship to God (forgiveness of sins), not our relationship to fellow humans in the world (a society of peace and justice). Jesus is sine qua non for the first, not the second. God operates in the second not “needing” Jesus to get his work done there. Yes, he even uses the “rulers of this world” for just that agenda.

Deep down, despite Borg's claim to the contrary, KoG is NOT a political term betokening a "realm of peace and justice." It's a relational term, God's NEW way of relating to sinners via Jesus, new and different from how God otherwise does so. The focus is on God's new way of operating with sinners, not on what the world would look like if everybody got busy with a peace-and-justice social/political agenda. To wit, a world wherein there were no sinners at all.

It's incredible to me how the NT can be so mis-read on the KoG topic. But this is not the first time. It was so in Jesus' time: "Lord, will you at this time restore the Kingdom (of Davidic peace and justice)?" Nope, he said, not my job. It was so in the 16th century. Thomas Muentzer's agenda was just such a peace-and-justice kingdom. Luther disagreed.

Here's the skinny. Contrary to the KoG view in the 16th century—of both the Holy Roman emperor and Holy Roman papacy, and Muentzer and his allies—that Christ's regime is a social/political entity, a "Platonic republic" as the reformers designate it, the Luth. Confessors insisted on saying that the KoG is God rescuing sinners and making faith happen. That's the meaning of such talk as "in the heart," or in the "spiritual" (not spooky or ethereal) realm, the God-relational turf.

The word "regime, God's own regime-change" would be today's best translation for the KoG term. Especially since the US continues fatefully and fatally to foster "regime-change" throughout the world. Thus, the NT Gospels make perfectly clear that in Jesus God is fulfilling a promise for his own "regime-change" with sinners. In Lutheran Latin lingo it's a "coram deo" (interface with God) agenda, not a "coram hominibus" (interface with fellow humans).

Oh, yes, that "coram hominibus" turf, the human-to-human

interface, does get lots of attention in Luth. Reformation theology, but it's under the rubric of God's Left Hand—where God is deeply involved in peace and justice stuff with his designated southpaws—zillions of them. KoG is the work of God's Right hand and of him now residing at God's right hand. "Rulers of this world" have no "stuff" to make this right-hand KoG happen. Neither do Borgian theologians who are out to replace those rulers.

Bleazard cites ML in the Large Catechism on the "Thy kingdom come petition." It's all about Christ's saving work to bring sinners to faith. For a clean contrast to this discussion of KoG, go to Luther's large catechism on the 4th petition. That is where he does indeed address the left-hand work of God—the *coram hominibus* world of daily life in human society, the peace and justice arena. Plenty of peace and justice stuff there. BUT never once does Jesus even get mentioned. That's not an accident. Jesus's agenda is KoG, God's regime-change with sinners. Keeping the old creation from falling apart is mightily important to God, but it's not what God's doing in the KoG department. "Daily bread"—defined by ML as everything needed for human social/political existence—is NOT KoG. God's got scads of other southpaws assigned to those tasks. That's what the Book of Concord says. Granted, the reformers could be wrong. But Bleazard seems to think they might be on target. He's right, of course. Borg is not. He seems not to have a clue about this Lutheran catechetical heritage.

The closest Borg comes to anything like "*coram deo*" talk is his couple references at the end of the article to "centering in God." If that is what Jesus was up to, then the Pharisees should have been his heroes. KoG = centering in God? Nonsense. Jesus was out to get sinners forgiven (and that was a "life-giving"—ahem!—task for him). He didn't ask these sinners to "center" in God! He invited them to trust his word of

forgiveness, to move from unfaith to faith. "Young man, you'll be glad to hear this: Your sins are forgiven." Also to the Pharisees: "get un-centered from God the legislator, and get offered an alternate center, God's sin-forgiver Jesus." If you want to talk about "centering in God," that's the Reformation rubric for doing so. If Borg does know that, he never divulges it to us.

Deep down, this widespread view of KoG is the triumph of Calvinism "centering" things Christian in the "sovereignty of God." It's taking over again—also among Lutherans who write for THE Lutheran — with a vengeance. For the Lutheran reformers it's not God's sovereignty, but God's mercy that's at the Christian center. Here Calvin surprisingly parallels the classic RC notion of the church as an earthly kingdom, a "Platonic republic" where peace and justice run the show. So Calvin tried to make Geneva just that, a "kingdom of God" city. For a while he succeeded where Muentzer failed. But it didn't last. Reason: it couldn't last. Allegedly "Christian" earthly kingdoms always collapse. They are built on sand. Christ's KoG has other foundations.

For the Lutheran reformers Calvin's social engineering with supposed KoG grounding was not only a frightful misreading of the NT Gospels. It was also a lunge toward the utopianism of the Left-wingers of the Reformation—to create a "perfect" human society—even if in miniature—where somehow (magically?) sin-in-the-citizens wouldn't interfere to mess up the paradise of peace and justice.

Nonsense, said the Luth. reformers. KoG is precisely addressed to the sin agenda, and that means to human hearts, to the false gods they are fearing, loving and trusting, with a goal to get them fearing, loving, trusting God focused on the person and work of Jesus.

Yes, God knows this about the deadly dangers of a sinner-populated planet. So Luther concludes: Because of this given “sin-factor” now messing up creation, God set up his Left-handed regimes—multiples of them in all “secular” societies (aka regimes of God’s “law”)—to moderate the sinful-hearts factor, with carrots and sticks. [Self-centered sinners would respond to rewards for good behavior and (most of the time) avoid the stick for their bad behaviors.]

Left-hand regimes, of course, would never cure the sinful hearts. Rampages, big and little injustices, big and little un-peace, insane wars—even by so-called born-again Christian leaders—would still occur. But until the chaos of the very last days, when even these divine emergency measures would buckle, God’s law-regimed structures in the old creation would restrain sinners from wrecking everything.

Only one thing “heals” sinful hearts, the KoG, God’s regime-change that came to fullness in Jesus. Folks with sinful hearts get a new offer from God called mercy. When they trust that Christ-achieved mercy they do indeed go with new freedom, new courage, back into their old left-handed assignments, but they don’t try to make the world a “Jesus-world.” Instead they join God-conscious of what they (and God) are doing out there in the old creation—in the law-regime to keep the world from blowing apart. Sure, that is peace and justice stuff—and tender loving care, etc. But they don’t get their signals for p&j from Jesus. He himself never gave any specs for that. “Natural law and human reason” is what the Reformers say over and over again when asked where to get cues for our callings in the world. NEVER do they say “Check out the KoG for your signals.” And never ever do they hype another current p.c. shibboleth about “Gospel values” to be enacted in society.

This is a hot potato in lots of areas of today’s Christian

*scene, as you, dear editor, may well know. Most patent it is in missiology circles today, where peace and justice notions are the reigning definition of Christian mission in a pluralist world. Prose coming from our own ELCA mission division is regularly laced with this lingo. But THE Lutheran, your journal (OUR journal) ought not to be on the wrong page on this one. It's at the core of what the Reformation was all about. Borg missed it. THE LUTHERAN needs to publish an op ed, a second opinion, on this one.*

*Peace and Joy!*

*Ed Schroeder*

Yes, gentle ThTh reader, herewith another installment of "Crossings melody for a one-string banjo." But if it is indeed the song that makes the NEW Testament new, what's to do? Especially when so many looney tunes are being sung everywhere. Yes—sob!—worst of all, within the churches. Hope you too can "stay on message."

Cheers!

EHS

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# **A Christian Message and the Virginia Tech Massacre—One More Time**

Colleagues,



## PART I

*To begin with a full(er) disclosure on last week's posting. I did disclose—and send on to you—the five submissions that came in as “Christian Message Proposals for VTU the Day after the Massacre.” What I didn't tell you was that there were only three that “came in” from y'all. The other two were composed by yours truly. They did “come in,” but—you might say—through the windows. I'd hoped for a fuller basket, so . . . .After last week's posting another one arrived. I pass it on below. It's from an ELCA pastor in northwest USA. She told me that she purposely held verbatim to the original message offered at VTU as much as she could, and then “christified” it where she thought it could have been done. It's a fascinating exercise.*

*[En passant she told me that at her ELCA synod assembly recently “I made the cut from 54 nominees for bishop to seven.” From what she says below, they wouldn't have done wrong had they elected her, I think.]*

*I reprint here the VTU original and then the RCV (revised christified version) paragraph by paragraph. To highlight the emendations in the RCV they appear in caps. Both versions contain 304 words.*

*VTU original, paragraph 1.*

*We gather this afternoon for many purposes: to weep for lost friends and family, to mourn our lost innocence, to walk forward in the wake of unspeakable tragedy, to seek hope in the shadow of despair, to join our voices in a longing for peace, healing, and understanding greater than any single community of faith, to embrace that which unifies, and to reject the seductive temptation of hatred. We gather to share our hurts and our hopes, our petitions and our prayers. We gather also to drink deeply of religious streams which have refreshed parched*

peoples for generations. We gather together...Weeping, oh yes, we weep with sighs too deep for words, out of inexpressible pain-but also affirming the sovereignty of life over death.

RCV

We gather this afternoon for many purposes: to weep for lost friends and family, to mourn our lost innocence, to walk forward in the wake of unspeakable tragedy, to seek hope in the shadow of despair, to join our voices in a longing for peace, healing, and understanding greater than any single community of faith, to embrace that which unifies, and to reject the seductive temptation of hatred. We gather to share our hurts and our hopes, our petitions and our prayers. We gather together...Weeping, oh yes, we weep with sighs too deep for words, out of inexpressible pain-but also affirming the GIFT OF GOD'S HEALING FOR OUR BROKENNESS.

VTU original, paragraph 2.

At a time such as this the darkness of evil seems powerful indeed. It casts a pall over our joys, joys as simple as a glorious spring day on the drill field. We struggle to imagine a future beyond this agony. If we ever harbored illusions that our campus is an idyllic refuge from the violence of the world, they are gone forever. Yet we come to this place to testify that the light of love can not finally be defeated. Amid all our pain, the light shines in the darkness and darkness has not overcome it. We can not do everything, but we can do something. We can not banish all darkness but we can, by joining together, push it back. We can not undo yesterday's tragic events, but we can sit in patient silence with those who mourn. As we share light, one with another, we reclaim our campus. Let us deny death's power to rob us of all that we have loved about Virginia Tech. Let us cast our lot with hope in defiance of despair.

RCV

*At a time such as this the darkness of evil seems powerful indeed. It casts a pall over our joys, joys as simple as a glorious spring day on the drill field. We struggle to imagine a future beyond this agony. If we ever harbored illusions that our campus is an idyllic refuge from the violence of the world, they are gone forever. YET WHEN THE VIOLENCE OF THE WORLD TOOK JESUS DOWN, GOD WAS THERE, WEEPING. GOD IS WEEPING HERE NOW. WHEN THE DARKNESS OF DEATH SNUFFED JESUS OUT, GOD DID NOT LET THE DARKNESS PREVAIL. GOD OPENED A DOOR INTO DEATH AND DREW JESUS OUT INTO LIFE AGAIN, SO THAT THERE WILL BE A WAY OUT OF THIS FEAR AND GRIEF FOR US, TOO. DEATH ULTIMATELY HAS NO power to rob us of OUR HOPE OR FUTURE IN CHRIST. AS we come to this place, we testify that BECAUSE GOD WAS IN CHRIST, RECONCILING THE WORLD TO GOD, the light of love cannot finally be defeated. Amid all our pain, the CHRIST-light shines in the darkness and darkness has not overcome it. CHRIST'S LIGHT AND LIFE AND LOVE ARE FOR US NOW.*

## **PART II**

*This week also brought a thoughtful piece from another ELCA pastor, but not a 304 word homilette.*

*"I did not submit one for one very good reason. I wasn't there. I didn't experience what he experienced, I didn't have the constraints of time and of grief and maybe anger."Would I have said something different . . . probably. Would I have at least mentioned God and Jesus . . . don't know . . . I hope I would have . . . but I surely would if I were submitting one to this forum. In academic exercises, we all want to please the teacher!*

*"I don't think your critique of Pastor King's remarks was unfair, rather misplaced. Certainly if you felt strongly*

enough about it, you should have brought it to our brother in Christ, just you and him. I assume you didn't do that. If you did, I apologize for my ass-u-me-tion.

"I don't know Pastor King at all, but I hope we can all cut him a little slack for his comments . . . It must have been a very hard week or weeks for him. And maybe we can assume . . . that he was and is a valuable pastoral presence within that community, and that maybe, just maybe, he touched lives through his ministry during that very difficult time.

"Blessings"

In my response I picked up on two items: the tete-a-tete recommended of "just you and him," and the "cut him a little slack for his comments."

**A. the tete-a-tete, just "you and him."**

The allusion is to Matthew 18:15ff. "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone." NRSV. That doesn't sound to me like the situation here. But more than one of you have told me that to you it did. Granted, you can't totally separate the message from the messenger. The object of my critique, however—doubtless not cleanly done—was the message, not the messenger. The message is an "objective" document out in the world, initially an "objective" public statement that went to millions across the world. Apart from what the messenger may have intended, his "Christian message" now stands there, now an historical document. [If I did engage in ad hominem stuff, I was wrong. I've never met the messenger, had never heard his name before. I do not think that he "sinned against me," since he'd probably never heard of me either.]

Punning on Marshall McLuhan's popular axiom "The medium makes

the message,” Bob Bertram liked to say of pastors that “the message makes the messenger.” Past ThTh postings have sought to check out the Christian message offered at VTU. Calling that message “Christ-less” is not an opinion. It’s a fact. If there are no clouds and the sun is shining, the sky is blue. That is not an opinion. That is what the word “blue” means. If there is no Christ in a proposed Christian message, then the message is Christ-less.

That is the issue, not some sin separating Christian brothers.

But when I passed this on to this colleague, he was not convinced. “I would disagree. . . . I believe Matthew 18 applies in that Pastor King is a colleague, a peer of yours and mine. Even in the midst of his very public non-proclamation of the Christian message, he deserved to be taken aside, yes just you and him; for admonishment and correction.”

### **And when it came to “cutting him some slack,”**

I confessed not knowing how to do that vis-a-vis a Christless message passed off as Christian. Searching for NT precedents I found only the opposite. Jesus never “cut preacher-types of his day a little slack”—so far as I can tell—when they gave false witness, or even worse, when he labelled them false prophets. Paul cuts no slack when he anathematizes the “other” gospel circulating within his Galatian congregation. Remember it’s the message that’s being weighed and found wanting, though the messenger is not far away. How do you “cut slack” on an “other” Gospel, a Christ-empty gospel? I don’t know how to do that. Possibly some of you in the Crossings community can show me how that can be done.

“We all goof up at times. Give the guy a break” is what I think I’m supposed to hear. True enough. If it weren’t so serious, I’d like to follow that counsel.

*How serious is it? That is the question. If a message offers pabulum in the face of death where Christic-penicillin is called for—which seems perfectly clear to me and to RCV writer above—then the message is deceitful. If the doctor prescribing that pabulum wants us to think it's Christic-penicillin, then we have a case of gross malpractice. How much slack is in order in such cases?*

*To these thoughts of mine this dear colleague sent back this trial-by-fire slice-of-life:*

*"My own willingness to cut him slack comes from my year-long experience as a Chaplain at a combat support hospital in Iraq. When I first heard about the massacre at Virginia Tech, I turned off news reports, didn't listen to the tales of the carnage . . . for a week I struggled with the reaction of others to Pastor King's "Christian" message. Having been in the eye of the storm for a year, I could imagine what he was going through. Did he know anyone killed, did he experience the grief and sorrow that all care-givers saw. Yes, we need to perform especially when the "shit" hits the fan. But you know, in the midst of unimaginable grief and sorrow . . . well. I was never asked to preach at a memorial service, unit chaplain's got to do that. I simply prayed and cried along with the soldiers who came through the hospital, both wounded and staff."I know how much I have struggled both that year and since I got home to put my experience in a spiritual context. I am reminded of Roland Bainton's talking about Luther's discovery of the Gospel as he studied Psalm 22, "The judge upon the rainbow became the derelict upon the cross." Indeed in the midst of the carnage, God often seems absent, but in the midst of the suffering and death, there is our God, in flesh, in Christ Jesus. In the midst of the horror we cause, our Lord is present, in a massive way. Still working through it. So yes, I do cut Pastor King a little slack, and*

*I hope and pray that he did indeed offer the hope of our Lord at Virginia Tech."*

Slack for the messenger.

"Hope of our Lord at Virginia Tech" for the RCV message.

OK. All that's needed is to get the two together.

My hope and prayer too.

And surely that of all you readers.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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# **Christian Message Proposals for VTU the Day after the Massacre**

Colleagues,

I didn't get offerings from all 600 of you with my overture last week for "revisions or alternatives" (as one of you asked for) vis-a-vis Pastor Bill King's Christian message at the VTU convocation the day after the massacre. I diidn't even get 6! Only 5. I wonder why so few. So there's no need to turn the submissions over to the local committee for them to choose which ones to pass on to you. You get them all. Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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**First off, the original from Pastor William H. King, Lutheran Campus Pastor at Virginia Tech:**

We gather this afternoon for many purposes: to weep for lost friends and family, to mourn our lost innocence, to walk forward in the wake of unspeakable tragedy, to seek hope in the shadow of despair, to join our voices in a longing for peace, healing, and understanding greater than any single community of faith, to embrace that which unifies, and to reject the seductive temptation of hatred. We gather to share our hurts and our hopes, our petitions and our prayers. We gather also to drink deeply of religious streams which have refreshed parched peoples for generations. We gather together...Weeping, oh yes, we weep with sighs too deep for words, out of inexpressible pain-but also affirming the sovereignty of life over death. At a time such as this the darkness of evil seems powerful indeed. It casts a pall over our joys, joys as simple as a glorious spring day on the drill field. We struggle to imagine a future beyond this agony. If we ever harbored illusions that our campus is an idyllic refuge from the violence of the world, they are gone forever. Yet we come to this place to testify that the light of love can not finally be defeated. Amid all our pain, the light shines in the darkness and darkness has not overcome it. We can not do everything, but we can do something. We can not banish all darkness but we can, by joining together, push it back. We can not undo yesterday's tragic events, but we can sit in patient silence with those who mourn. As we share light, one with another, we reclaim our campus. Let us deny death's power to rob us of all that we have loved about Virginia Tech. Let us cast our lot with hope in defiance of despair.



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## ***This one from Michigan***

*As we gather here today many of us are mad at God for allowing this to happen. All the good things we religious people talk about seem mighty far away. God seems distant, impotent, and useless. I would be lying if I were to tell you that this doesn't disturb me. But as difficult as it seems to believe in a Good God today, it seems even more difficult to deny what we just celebrated at Easter. God knows we are angry. But God doesn't run away from our anger. God has come to us in Jesus Christ, and he was despised and rejected. You see, Jesus upsets our apple carts when we think we are doing OK. Because of this, he had to be removed, and we killed him.*

*You would think that we would be in even more trouble with God after this, but amazingly enough that is not what the stories say. Jesus is alive! And what Jesus is saying is that he and his Father still want to be reconciled with us. In Jesus God enters the Godless places of the world so nothing, even our lives can be beyond God.*

*We are given by God's Holy Spirit very concrete gifts. In Baptism we dare to declare people "Not Guilty". In Communion we celebrate where the world is headed – the great banquet where God gives us all bread to eat and even "the wolf shall live with the Lamb". And we are given possibly the greatest gift of all – the ability to tell one another that this tragedy we see today is not the end. Instead God is somehow shaping us and this world into the way things ought to be.*

*We can trust Jesus because he's been there. Better yet, Jesus IS here. He doesn't give us up.*

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## **One from the West Coast**

We are here today because of an overwhelming tragedy experienced by our university community. Some may be impressed primarily by the number of those who died; others because the large number of deaths only deepens an individual experience of tragedy and evil. Thirty-three died together – but each died alone. The loneliness of death is only emphasized by our effort to live as a learning community. The more we speak of trusting god the more we are challenged to explain how we can continue to trust in spite of the reality of evil and death. The university community works together to explore all of life and our world through experiment, intuition, and reason. Today we individually and collectively remember the limits both to our understanding and our ability to master and control what happens. We are today painfully aware of the limits of our ability to understand and control even the life of an academic community. We know that these things should not have happened but do not know what we might have done to prevent them. The more serious and successful our search for truth in thinking and goodness in living, the more aware we are of our remaining ignorance of truth and our vulnerability to evil.

This ambiguity tempts us to abandon the search for truth and goodness or, even worse, to use it cynically in the service of evil and our own selfish purposes. In the face of that temptation, we need to encourage one another in the search for truth, in the affirmation of the value of life, and in our commitment to use the talents and opportunities given to us in loving the people close to us and serving the communities that make life together possible. We can help each other to continue in that struggle.

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## **One from the Middle West**

*A word from the Prophet Isaiah, shared by Jews and Christians: "Surely thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior." "Where were YOU, God?" people ask. People of faith—and of un-faith. Isaiah can help us all.*

*God "hidden" and still "savior?" Both true? Don't REAL saviors have to be visible, not hidden? So which one is it – hidden-God or Savior-God?*

*In Jesus, Christians claim, Isaiah's opposites converge: God "hidden" where we least expect God to be – on earth, humanized, even on a bloody cross reminiscent of yesterday at VTU.*

*AND God as Savior – also on earth, humanized, also on that cross where death takes its toll. But in his death, so the Christian message, death itself meets its master, gets undone.*

*In yesterday's massacre God-hidden was right in our face, no God-savior there at all. In Jesus' day bloody massacres happened too. When once asked to "explain why," he refused. Instead, he addressed the survivors, "Did you hear God's voice in the destruction, calling you to a major turn-around? If not, expect more bad news."*

*Though hidden in catastrophes, God is not absent. God-hidden has a voice. Some hear it; some don't.*

*For folks – also us here today – who do hear, who make that U-turn, God comes out of hiding. Comes on as Savior. In the Jesus story. With a freebee offer for survival. Survival big-time. Even in the face of yesterday's horrors.*

*Adding Jesus to the equation changes things. The horror story doesn't disappear, but Jesus-added puts a different conclusion at the end of the equation—words of hope, words of courage, for us in our agony. Yesterday was a visit from God-hidden. The Christian message for us survivors is God-Savior. Receive it. Believe it.*

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### **One from the East Coast**

*Nothing, absolutely nothing, can come from my own language system, or any language system, which can adequately meet the desperate death and dying of these days. As a minister of Jesus Christ, and like you, I am numbed and dumbed down by these days of death. We cry out, we crawl, we stagger woundedly towards a weeping Christ, begging for some kind, of consolation in the mystery of death's dagger which struck like a thief in the middle of our campus home. Our lives are changed forever, but we have an eternal promise in Jesus Christ. Believe it. In this everlasting moment of profound tragedy, we still hang on to life in a fleeting, fearful, forgetful, and frenzied age. We know that there are the woundings of death and dying in the lives of each of us, and in the constant war news of the daily press, but we are struck dumbfounded that here at Virginia Tech, surrounded by the beautiful mountains, that the darkness of death can slip in so unexpectedly. The world has changed for each and all of us. We lament, we cry out, to a God who seems to be absent, and our tears search for some kind of answer to an unfathomable tragedy. Words dry up...all the knowledge on our campus disintegrates in the face of these days of death.*

*Repeat it to yourself throughout the day: "Nothing...shall separate you and me, from the love that we have in Jesus*

Christ our Lord.” Our Lord comes to us in those Words. This is the only and the final answer to what has happened. Take it with you.

We have seen death; now you have experienced the loneliness of death’s dark passage. But...we have also experienced healing in Jesus Christ...go, each of you, in that healing hope. Amen.

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**Another one from the Middle West [“sticking with the light/darkness imagery of Pastor King’s original”]**

For ages Christians have prayed this prayer when darkness prevails: “Enlighten our Darkness, O Lord our God, by the light of your Christ. May his Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.” We Hokies have met darkness as never before. “Yes, God, Enlighten our darkness.”

The light/darkness language in Christian tradition starts out tough, telling us that we are not only victims of darkness in times like this, but also agents of darkness at other times. Yesterday’s mad murderer (as we will learn tomorrow) screamed about the darkness—lovelessness, he said—that encompassed him at VTU. Clinically sick though he was, did he speak truth? Is that darkness not just his deep darkness, but ours as well?

“Enlighten our darkness, O Lord our God,” both the darkness inflicted upon us and the darkness we inflict on others.

This Christ-light “shines into the darkness,” we Christians say. Initially to expose all agents of darkness. And then, much to their surprise, our surprise too, it turns its beam on the light-bearer himself. His face is smiling, not grimacing, his hands open, not clenched. Look closely, and you see scars in those hands, signs of his own wrestling with

*Deep Darkness long ago. "Come, follow me," he says. "Stay in my circle of light. Yes, you will encounter darkness again, but the darkness did not overcome me, and it will not overcome you."*

*In our agony, Christ's light shines into our darkness too—yes, shines over to us. We cannot banish all darkness, but we can step into the Christ-light, walk in that light, and reflect its glow as we strive to reclaim our campus. The "light of God's Christ" resources us to deny death's power, to cast our lot with hope in defiance of despair.*

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# **Gospel Proclamation—Always a Challenge. At Virginia Tech . . . and at Other Places, All Other Places**

Colleagues,

PART ONE:

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION—ALWAYS A CHALLENGE. AT VIRGINIA TECH . . .

In recent days more than one of you on the listserve has told me to show-and-tell what I would have said if I'd been asked to give a "Christian message" at the convocation following the Virginia Tech massacre last month. Not all of these missives were friendly. One, e.g., after reading my opinion on the

“Christian message” that was offered at VT, said: “Boy, am I glad that YOU weren’t asked to give that message.”

So I’ve been thinking about that. What would I have said, if I’d been asked. I spin something out, but (it’s one of my thorns in the flesh) it gets too long. For the moment I’m holding back and now a new notion has bubbled through the brain: Why not ask the entire ThTh readership to offer “revisions or alternatives” (as one of you asked me for) to what Pastor King offered in the aftermath of that horrendous day.

And THEN, step two, I’d ask four local Crossings folks here in St. Louis—two men (one parish pastor, one lay preacher) and two women (one parish pastor, one lay-preacher) to be the readers of these homilettes. The quartet would then decide which ones we pass on to the rest of the listserve folks—for good or ill.

That’s what I’m asking from you. If all 600-plus of you on the primary listserve respond, we’ll have enough material to take us through to ThTh #500—a mere 34 posts away—and I could take my third retirement early. If 2% respond, we’ll have a dozen.

This is not a contest. No winners will be chosen.

We might see it as an exercise in item #5 of the “many ways” in which “God offers the Gospel,” as Luther puts it in the Smalcald Articles. After listing proclamation, baptism, Lord’s supper and confession/absolution he adds a fifth: “and finally through the mutual conversation and consolation” of Christ’s disciples with one another.

So here’s an invitation to converse and console.

The ONE AND ONLY RULE for the conversation/consolation is this: your c&c message may not exceed 304 words, the actual word count on Pastor King’s original message.

GO for it.

Here's the text of Pastor King's message. I copied it from the on-line Journal of Lutheran Ethics May 2007 Volume 7, Issue 5

William H. King is the Lutheran Campus Pastor at Virginia Tech

*[1] We gather this afternoon for many purposes: to weep for lost friends and family, to mourn our lost innocence, to walk forward in the wake of unspeakable tragedy, to seek hope in the shadow of despair, to join our voices in a longing for peace, healing, and understanding greater than any single community of faith, to embrace that which unifies, and to reject the seductive temptation of hatred. We gather to share our hurts and our hopes, our petitions and our prayers. We gather also to drink deeply of religious streams which have refreshed parched peoples for generations. We gather together...Weeping, oh yes, we weep with sighs too deep for words, out of inexpressible pain-but also affirming the sovereignty of life over death.[2] At a time such as this the darkness of evil seems powerful indeed. It casts a pall over our joys, joys as simple as a glorious spring day on the drill field. We struggle to imagine a future beyond this agony. If we ever harbored illusions that our campus is an idyllic refuge from the violence of the world, they are gone forever. Yet we come to this place to testify that the light of love can not finally be defeated. Amid all our pain, the light shines in the darkness and darkness has not overcome it. We can not do everything, but we can do something. We can not banish all darkness but we can, by joining together, push it back. We can not undo yesterday's tragic events, but we can sit in patient silence with those who mourn. As we share light, one with another, we reclaim our campus. Let us deny death's power to rob us of all that we have loved about Virginia Tech. Let us cast our lot with hope in defiance of despair.*



*If you, gentle reader, are moved right now to compose your own 304 words, STOP right here and do so. Go no further to read what's below. It may distract you.*

## PART TWO:

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION—ALWAYS A CHALLENGE. . . . AND AT OTHER PLACES, ALL OTHER PLACES.

Every now and then I get called on the carpet for “the Seminex grad we have as pastor.” “The one you sent us is a lemon.” “This one split our congregation and took half of the membership with him to start an independent church.” “Our grad from your place doesn’t preach the Gospel, and, possibly even worse, doesn’t know that he’s not doing it.” I have witnessed “live” instances of this last complaint—and the pain of “he doesn’t know that he’s not doing it.”

We all know, I trust, that a seminary degree (even one from Seminex—sob!) guarantees nothing. Some folks catch the “Aha!” and some folks don’t. By their fruits, not their sheepskins, you shall know them.

Most recently I was alerted to “one of yours” at Such-and-So Lutheran Church. Its second name is “Herchurch.” The Seminex-grad pastor promotes she-ology, offers “Praying the Goddess Rosary,” invokes “the name of the Cosmic Mother, the Risen Christ, Amen!”

How does this all fit under a Lutheran rubric? Here’s how: “Re-imagining God is very Lutheran — Luther re-imaged God from the traditional angry God (Jesus) with a sword in one hand and a lily in the other while seated above people being sent to hell. Via scripture and reason and trust, Luther re-imaged a loving God of grace and forgiveness. . . . Our Christian/Lutheran feminist prayers and liturgy reach back into the storehouse of tradition to bring forth names as Mother, Shaddai, Sophia, Womb,

Midwife, Shekinah, She Who Is. They do so out of renewed insights into the nature of the Gospel empowered by the risen Christ-Sophia.”

So the claim is to be Gospel-grounded. Can’t argue with that. But I need to learn more about the Herchurch-Gospel empowered by Christ-Sophia. There have been other such Gospels in the two millennia of church history, and in some cases they were indeed “other” Gospels.

I imagine that all Seminex grads now pastoring would claim to operate “Gospel-grounded.” If for no other reason than that was the shibboleth of the day during our decade of existence -1973-83. But what is “gospel-grounding?” One favorite in these ThTh postings for answering that is the “double-dipstick.” Timothy Hoyer rang the changes on this Melanchthonian yardstick a couple of weeks ago (ThTh 459) as he measured the habit of American denominations to make “social statements.” He stirred up a fuss with the bad report card he gave to such ventures, a fuss that hasn’t been reported out to you readers (yet)—that came from some dearest friends.

Back to the double dipstick. Gospel-grounded proclamation and practice must a) use—not mis-use or ab-use or ignore—the merits and benefits of Christ, and that means the BIGGIE benefits at the God-sinner interface, AND b) get those goodies over to the sinners so that they do indeed receive and then enjoy the benefits.

As I coast into my anecdotage in my mid-seventies, I marvel more and more at Bob Bertram’s brilliance in specifying the three movements in the Crossings process—grounding, tracking, crossing. Each one of which is not just a task to be performed, but a skill to be learned. I’ve noted before that this was a further evolution of what Bob (and I too) had learned from “Doc”

Caemmerer when he was our homiletics prof—for Bob in the 1940s, for me a decade later.

It is a skill to do the GROUNDING, namely, to dig into a Biblical text and squeeze it hard for its own diagnostic and prognostic data about the case-study at hand in that text—not resting until you’ve gotten to a God-sized problem that will necessitate a Christ-sized remedy. And not just some generic Jesus, but the crucified and risen One.

Next it is a skill to do the TRACKING, to examine folks today, a contemporary slice-of-life, and X-ray it to the same depth as you did with the grounding. Rule of thumb for this in Lutheran lingo is: keep probing the contemporary slice-of-life to see where it too “necessitates Christ.”

Both of those processes entail hard work. But harder still as a skill is step three—CROSSING the person(s) you’ve tracked with the diagnostic/prognostic data from your grounding work.

This step 3 is the primal agenda in Christian proclamation. USING Christ’s benefits so that the receivers actually GET the benefits. If this doesn’t happen, the sermon is a failure. Even if the Grounding and Tracking were brilliantly done, to fail in making crossings is akin to torture. “Smell that good food in the kitchen. I can see that you are starving. Good luck, I hope you somehow get to the kitchen.”

In the last two Seminex-grad sermons I witnessed, one forgot to talk about what was in the kitchen. The second one did do that, but never got the goodies out of the kitchen onto a plate in front of our noses. We were left to marvel how wonderful these goodies all were—and then we were sent home with the same empty tummies we’d brought to church when we entered the place. [If I did any additional nosing my way into “Herchurch,” it would be to examine what’s cooking in the kitchen. The pastor of

Herchurch, one of Seminex's brightest and best, my dear friend too, will know what I'd be sniffing for. I wonder what she'd show me.]

I've written something in response to these two pastors. In one case I showed it first to a long-time acquaintance in that congregation, who had sat next to me in the pew. He told me not to send it. It "would hurt too much." In the other case I didn't ask anyone for clearance, sent it and got an appreciative word back.

Here's the one I didn't send:

*Dear xxx, I was guest at worship in your congregation, as you know, not long ago. We had a pleasant chit-chat afterwards. Here's some stuff intended to encourage you, though it starts out like you might expect from one of your old profs:*

- 1. I know you want to be feeding your people the Gospel, but in that sermon it didn't happen.*
- 2. Thus we the folks at the trough had a problem, and you the feeder did too.*
- 3. We know that you do want to be feeding us Gospel, but it seems that you don't notice that it was not happening.*
- 4. In keeping with the NT text for that sermon, Jesus healing a deaf man—you too may have a hearing problem in this respect: not being able to hear when you are not feeding your people the Gospel.*
- 5. There are objective criteria for checking that out. It's not a subjective matter.*
- 6. Just as there are objective criteria for whether a medical doctor is fulfilling her calling: Do the patients get better, or do they stay sick?*
- 7. You most likely had Doc Caemmerer, or George Hoyer, or Andy Weyermann as your homiletics prof at Seminex. I know*

*their individual paradigms for preaching the Gospel. Thus I know that all three of them would have told you that your sermon on the day we were there “needs a little work” to make it Gospel proclamation.*

- 8. It’s possible that you were borrowing from someone else’s prepared material. And that’s not necessarily bad. Bad is when borrowed material itself does not proclaim the Gospel. Then Gospel-committed preachers have got to “fix” the defective stuff.*
- 9. You may/may not remember that line from Apology 4 in the Lutheran Confessions that we hyped in Seminex days: when some passage (or package) proposed for use in a Christian congregation is Gospel-less, then you have to “add the Gospel promise.”*
- 10. Another of the shibboleths from Seminex was the old “double dipstick” that Melanchthon uses in Apology IV. You measure the OK-ness of any proposed teaching or preaching by testing it for two things: 1) Does it really USE the merits/benefits of Christ as it makes its pitch, or just MENTION them as part of the prose? Mere mention fails the test. 2) Do these benefits actually get across to the folks—the issue of transfer/transmission—so that they get these goodies woven into their own lives?*
- 11. Both of these sides of double-dipstick measuring are objective. You can talk about them. You can put them on the table. You can measure a sermon. You can see when in a specific sermon each side measured by the dipstick—or one, but not the other—or neither—did indeed happen, and when it didn’t.*
- 12. That sermon when we were in the congregation was a winsome series of Jesus material. All of that true. But none of it passes the double dipstick test. It’s “fides historica” stuff. Nor does it pass Caemmerer’s “Goal, Malady, Means,” or George Hoyer’s “Problem, Point,*

*Power.” [I can’t remember what Weyermann’s matrix was.]*  
13. *Once more, the issue is not “Did you pass the Caemmerer test?” It’s did the Good News get proclaimed, the stuff that Christ authorizes you to keep on telling us? Did it get over to us, yes “on our plate” in front of us? I know you want to do that with all your might. I want that to happen too—both for you and for all us parishioners everywhere. Be glad to continue the conversation.*

*[Here endeth the message never sent to the Seminex alum.]*

*Peace and Joy!*  
*Ed Schroeder*

Cheers! Ed

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## **Trusting the Promise: Abrahamic Faith Then and Now**

Colleagues:

Every now and then an email comes in asking for a “Gutachten.” That’s not the term they use, but that is what’s being asked for. Gutachten is an old German term for a piece of advice, an opinion, a “What are your thoughts . . .” on something that’s dicey or controversial, or just a sticky-wicket. Here are a couple of recent ones. Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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**Request #1.** Don't remember who asked this: "The 3 Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, Islam. Shouldn't we Christians be emphasizing what our faiths have in common (all coming from Abraham), not what makes us different from each other? Especially now with Israel and Islam daily on the front page? Aren't all three faiths really united in the care-and-redemption project God has given to the children of Abraham?"

### **Gutachten #1**

Basic is the point that "care and redemption" are not synonyms. So my pitch in Jewish-Christian conversation (also conversation with Muslims) is that we might quite easily (well, sometimes more easily than others) join hands—and heads and hearts—on the "care" agenda, but we go quite different ways on the "redemption" one.

E.g., Vis-a-vis Judaism: Obedience to the Torah and trusting the promise are not the same ball of wax. My hunch is that somewhere in the event of the Damascus-road (or in his yrs in the desert thereafter), this became the "Aha!" for super-Jew Saul of Tarsus. Which "Aha!" then gets spread out throughout his NT epistles.

Somewhere St. John got the same "Aha!" to prompt his own linch-pin line in the prologue 1:17. Which then gets played out in the rest of his Jesus-narrative. Especially in chapter 8:39-59 where a hefty debate arises about who really is, and who really isn't, offspring of Abraham. Jesus makes the feisty claim that the yardstick for determining Abrahamic paternity is your response to Jesus. And then gets very nasty as he uses the yardstick: "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I hear from God. This is not what

Abraham did. You are indeed doing what YOUR father does . . . your father, the devil.”

If Jesus’ verdict (according to John) about this faith claimed as “Abrahamic” in his day—where they even had “begat...begat...begat” documentation to support it—is negative, what then is the analogue for Islam? Islam too traces its paternity (and its theology) back to Abraham via his son Ishmael. That does provide parallels to Judaism’s Isaac-connection to Abraham. But it says nothing yet about analogues in either Judaism or Islam to Abraham’s faith, his trusting God’s promise. That was the point of contention in John 8. “Abrahamic” faith of some sort, but not the faith of Abraham himself, as Jesus portrays it. Is the same true of Islam? I think so.

In St. Paul’s brilliant Aha! about “two covenants” in the OT (Galatians 4)—one the Abrahamic promise, one the Mount Sinai law—he traces out the differences. Children of promise vs. children of slavery. And then Paul rubs it in as harshly as Jesus does in John 8. But he does it via MATERNITY, not PATERNITY. “Present day Jerusalem,” he says, is NOT on the Sarah-side for Abrahamic connection, but [aargh!] on the Hagar-side. Ouch! [Wonder how he might use the Sarah/Hagar metaphor today when “Hagar-side” = Islam own claim!] And Hagar in his metaphors runs a straight line to Sinai. Hagar-law-Ishmael = slavery. Sarah-promise-Isaac = freedom.

Seems to me that vis-a-vis Islam the same pertains. Islam’s cherished Hagar-connection for connecting to Abraham carries this double-edge. Does it ever get back to God’s promise to Abraham? Does it ever get beyond Sinai? I don’t know the Koran well, but I have a copy and I have gotten inside it. I can’t find THE promise in its pages anywhere. Between submission to Allah’s will and trusting the Abrahamic promise is a



continental divide from which the streams do not flow in the same direction. Two clearly different proposals for redemption, behind which are two clearly different pictures of salvation. One is reintegration “into Abraham’s bosom, God’s Abba-family,” the other a mythical paradise of Eden restored where everything is peachy-keen and no desire goes unfulfilled. One is mediated by promise-trusting, one by personal performance.

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## **Request #2.**

Early in April this came in.

“In next 10 days I will give a special lecture for MTh students in Pematangsiantar [Sumatra, Indonesia] about: The Thought/Thinking of Paul. I have 3 session on the same day. There are about 20 students. Have you any idea for this purpose? It is impossible to mention all Paul’s theology in one day. Thank you for your attention.”

[As you readers will soon see, if it has escaped you before, I DO have a one-track mind, a one-string banjo, and really only one broken-record “Gutachten” that gets played over and over again.

## **Gutachten #2.**

Here’s one idea. Overarching title: Paul’s own “Reformation discovery” – “Christ’s Gospel is a Promise”

## **Lecture #1. THE DISCOVERY**

Not Moses but Abraham is the center of the OT. The Gospel is a Promise. Christ connects his work to Abraham (and David) not to Moses. Abraham and David = both promissory covenants, Moses = performance covenant. Show the students the evidence in Romans 4 & 9, Galatians 3 & 4.

How that is important for our life today—in church and in the world.

## **Lecture #2 ONE CONSEQUENCE—How to read the Bible**

The Biblical hermeneutics following that discovery Paul as Exegete, his hermeneutics of the OT. Galatians 4 and his discovery (sic!) that there are TWO covenants in the OT. How Paul practices that hermeneutics when he uses OT texts.

How that hermeneutics became the hermeneutics of the Luth. Reformation.

How we use that hermeneutics today.

## **Lecture #3. ANOTHER CONSEQUENCE—Ethics of Freedom**

Paul's Promissory ethics for daily life: Freedom. Freedom, not submission (contra Islam, the faith of 180 million in Indonesia) is the center of Christian ethics. Present Pauline texts of "freedom" and show how he uses them. 2Cor 3:17, Gal.5 et passim.

>From this Luther (in his Galatians commentary) developed his notion of the two different "grammars" of the Law and of the Promise.

The grammar of the law says:

IF you do this and that, THEN God will do such and so.

Sample: The grammar of the ten commandments in Exodus 20/Deut 5:

IF you "love me and keep my commandments," THEN I will show you "chesedh." IF you don't keep my commandments, THEN I will "visit" your iniquities until the third and fourth generation of your offspring (=total extermination).

*The grammar of the Gospel promise goes like this: SINCE God-in-Christ did such and so, THEREFORE you do such and so.*

*Sample: The ethical admonitions–promise-imperatives–of the NT epistles everywhere. Check them out.*

*SINCE/BECAUSE God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, THEREFORE be reconciled to God and reconciled to one another.*

*Give sample cases to preach/teach freedom in pastoral work today in Indonesia.*

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### **Request #3.**

*“Tell us again: just what was the Gospel presented in that ‘Christian message’ offered at the time of the Virginia Tech massacre? And why didn’t you like it?”*

### **Gutachten #3.**

*The full text of the Christian message, ’twas only two minutes of time allotted, can be found at <[www.elca.org/jle](http://www.elca.org/jle)>*

*The gospel in that message is presented in the metaphors of Light vs. Darkness, Good vs. Evil, Life vs. Death. >From which comes this:*

*“The darkness of evil” has visited us at VT.*

*“Amid our pain, the light shines in the darkness and darkness has not overcome it.”*

*“We come to this place to testify that the light . . . cannot finally be defeated.”*

*“We can do something. We can push it [the darkness] back.”*

*“We can . . . share light, one with another.”*

*[Ergo] “Let us deny death’s power.”*

*The substance of that message is the classic Gospel of Zoroaster (aka Zarathustra), dating way back to the 6th century B.C. and still a lively religion among the Parsees in parts of Asia and in the Western world.*

*To call it a Christian message is simply not true. Christians will catch the reference to the first chapter of St. John's Gospel in the second sermon line quoted above—and that may tease us to think that the message is possibly Christian after all. But unless you tell the folks who that Light is, they might just as likely think it's Zoroaster, or their own inner spirituality, or who knows what. Here's an example: President Bush—a ThTh reader reminded me—quoted that passage from St. John verbatim (I think in a State of the Union address) as applying to the War on Terrorism. Born-again Christian that he is, he nevertheless told us that the USA was that Light and the Terrorist darkness would never overcome us. USA replaces Christ. Another false Gospel. Zoroastrianism #101.*

*In John's gospel, apart from Christ Darkness ALWAYS wins. The two-minute sermon deceives. "WE" cannot push it back. Apart from Christ we're part of the Darkness. Darkness doesn't push back darkness. The Christ who says "I am the Light of the world" [John 8:12] adds the consequence for those who don't "follow me." They "walk in darkness." As, sadly, doe this two-minute allegedly Christian message. And then at the end when the message encourages us to "deny death's power" on our own, it drives the final nail into the coffin. Pure Promethean madness. Another instance of the malignancy in America in our culture-wide "Denial of Death" [Ernst Becker]. Apart from Christ, death, like darkness, ALWAYS wins. That IS the Christian message. It's in the Bible.*

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**Request 4.**

Couple days ago this one came in. Not so much asking for a Gutachten, but more a jeremiad, asking for comfort, I guess. It links to Timothy Hoyer's recent recommendation [ThTh 459] that the Christian church NOT issue social statements—for a whole passel of reasons, Gospel-grounded reasons, he claimed. One was that the statements always come out as third-use of the law, "you gotta" imperatives. Law-imperatives (even when quoting Jesus) that are themselves not Gospel-grounded. For "Christian" action, Timothy claims, that's a no-no.

And doesn't that take us back to the one-string banjo, Paul in Galatians 4, freedom and slavery, his exegesis of God's "two covenants"? Could Paul's ethics of freedom have included "freedom" from such social statements? I bet that when pushed, he might just have said that. [Church social statements are, so far as I know, a distinctively American phenomenon. Can't remember ever encountering them in our galavanting around the world since 1993 as ELCA mission volunteers. I may have missed them, but if that is indeed true, I wonder why.]

Here's the jeremiad from an ELCA member, "just" a layman.

Ed, I have been too busy with church politics in our congregation here, for which I do not feel I am suited . . . . It is depressing how little "gospel" people hear or expect. It is obvious that we locally have not had the Augsburg Aha.

Anyway, I am a voting delegate for Synod Assembly. I just got my packet yesterday and can't believe the resolutions.

For example...

#### WORLD HUNGER

Whereas, God calls us to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8); and to loose the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free, and to share our bread

*with the hungry (Isaiah 58:6-7); and*

*Whereas, Jesus calls us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned (Matthew 25); and*

*Whereas, The XYZ Synod has been committed to the cause of alleviating world hunger and supportive of the ELCA World Hunger Appeal and has encouraged individuals and congregations to support the appeal; and*

*Whereas, The 2006 Synod Assembly reaffirmed a previous synod resolution which encouraged a goal of giving \$5.00 per baptized member per year to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal; therefore, be it*

*Resolved, That every congregation of the synod be strongly encouraged to have a monthly World Hunger Appeal Sunday during which World Hunger Appeal envelopes are made available at worship, a verbal reminder is made during the announcements for the day, a hunger-related vignette is printed in the bulletin, and an appropriate petition is offered in the Prayers of the Church; and*

*Resolved, That October 14, 2007, the Sunday before World Food Day, October 16, 2007, be designated as ELCA World Hunger Appeal Day; and*

*Resolved, That each congregation be strongly encouraged to support local, community hunger efforts providing food for the hungry, and*

*Resolved, That as a means of fulfilling this resolution to educate and encourage generous, regular giving, congregations use the ELCA World Hunger Appeal resources found in the hunger packets mailed to them from the churchwide office, the information provided by the Synod Hunger Team, and the*

resources on the [www.elca.org/hunger](http://www.elca.org/hunger) web site.

No Gospel. It looks rather that we are Christians by following a pathetic excuse for Law. There are two Jesus sayings that come to mind. "Go and sell all you have and give it to the poor." The real Law demands more. The real Law leaves us in tears, like Schindler in Schindler's List, because we could have and should have done more. "The poor you will always have with you." Jesus is anointed for burial. It seems to me that this is claiming that what is coming up, Jesus' death and Resurrection, is more important than the above.

And from Augsburg Confession Article XX: "Hence it is readily apparent that no one should accuse this teaching of prohibiting good works. On the contrary it is rather to be commended for showing HOW we can do good works." Since the above does not talk about faith, it does not talk about HOW we can do any of the above. I am reminded of Eph 3 – God brings us into more than we can ask for or imagine.

Or even Matthew 25. Those found righteous were shocked. When did we do this?

I guess it is time to pray some more for the Church.

#### **Gutachten #4**

You've given a vivid case-study to support Timothy Hoyer's caveat. And the irony is that the resolution-framers, dear folks all, doubtless wanted to do exactly what you cry for. But, alas, "they didn't know what they were doing." So they need help, Gospel help. Is any other conclusion plausible than that you are "called" to this assembly precisely for such a time as this?

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# Mixed Messages

Colleagues,

ThTh 462 analyzing the Lutheran pastor's message to the survivors of the Virginia Tech massacre drew some response. Most responders thought the pastor did proclaim an "other" Gospel.

1. Sorry to say, but you are just too on target.
2. It was even worse live. I watched on one of the networks. I figured we'd hear from you about this.
3. I hope Pr King hears you and takes to heart what you said. Is that the ministry that's coming out of Lutheran seminaries these days? Mee genoito.[=Frequent phrase from St. Paul, usually translated "God forbid."]
4. My first thought after he finished speaking was "If this is all he has to offer, why do we even bother with campus ministry."
5. Some will say, "Ed, you are too harsh. This was a multi-faith/no-faith community badly wounded and what they needed was comfort, not a call to repentance and not a narrowly Christian message that could divide." I think they would be wrong; this was an opportunity for Paster King to say, "Here is what the Christian – the one who is hitched to THE Promise – can tell you about this:" and then tell them.
6. I heard the whole talk—nothing about God let alone Christ. I was embarrassed. All the other religion speakers—Islam, Buddhist, Jew—sorry to say—made a lot more sense.
7. King's "sermon" is not unlike many I've heard in the ELCA.
8. I was steaming when I got the ELCA news release, and for the same reasons—calling something Christian that was



basically afraid to name the name. It is amazing, this close to Easter, that such an Easter-less message was given.

But others thought otherwise. Some said: Yes, he did proclaim an “other” gospel, but you didn’t do right in what you wrote.

Examples:

- A. Weren’t you breaking the 8th commandment, which in Luther’s Small Catechism calls you “to defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything”?
- B. You added “a personal attack, innuendo” to the (rightful) exposure of false Gospel.
- C. Your response to Pastor King (TT462) was correct but I found it harsh.
- D. I’m concerned about whether there might be a better way to communicate this critique—perhaps timing, perhaps a gentler turn of phrase—so that it can be heard.
- E. Unless I missed the All-Important good news you always tell, I felt you were not as pastoral to the empty pastor as you might be.
- F. I agree with your assessment of Bill’s remarks. However, I ponder the timing. I would have recommended going public with a critique after 30 days or so.
- G. I write only to question your TIMING. After this horrific event, when we all are struggling to find words, I find your open musings so soon are very ‘unloving’ and extremely insensitive. How easy it is in St. Louis where you have the luxury of distance to discern the events of Blacksburg, VA. I’m not saying you are not right, . . . but question the sensitivity and gravity of the stress and pain of the moment.
- H. The convocation was a media event. What more could you expect than P.C. rhetoric – especially from the allegedly

Christian speaker? "All the more so with the world's #1 snake-oil-salesman also on the program."

- I. One of you told me that King's Gospel was good gospel indeed (at least, good enough) for the immediate aftermath. "Real" Gospel would not have been heard. But this colleague called attention to something that had never crossed my mind, namely, the crazed killer himself—of all things—as God's voice to America. In the message he left us after the massacre (which text EHS has not yet seen in full)—in, with, under its mental madness—he's one of God's prophets, excoriating the lovelessness and hedonism at VT and thereby the entire nation. Analogous to God (in Isaiah) calling the murderous Assyrian emperor the "rod of my anger." But as a madman Cho will never be listened to by his (and God's!) intended audience. Ditto for any Christian attempt by a Lutheran campus minister to proclaim repentance (and then absolution) at the site.

To most of the eight above I have responded, sometimes longish-ly. Once I'd thought about passing those responses on to you ThTh readers, but it would be too much. But here's one, responding neither to kudo nor to critique. It's in response to a pastor from Australia. He's trying to cope with the sticky-wicket of God's hand in the massacre. We've already had a couple of exchanges. Here's the most recent one.

In a message dated 4/25/07 5:21:47 AM, he writes:

**Aussie:** *Your response immediately brought to my mind Luther arguing similarly [sc. God's hand in everything, even the horrors] in 'The Bondage of the Will,' and I've always been impressed by that writing.* **EHS:** *As I recall ML is even more brutal about God's hand in everything that happens in creation, even in God's letting the devil (who is finally GOD'S devil,*

*since there are not two Gods in the cosmos) get away with wholesale destruction.*

**Aussie:** *I will look closer at Deut 32:39. That one is more of a struggle for me, but it gets to the heart of my question: Exactly how is God in the mix when it comes to Virginia Tech?*

**EHS:** *There is either One God, or there are two or more. That's the Deuteronomist's claim. The Canaanites opted for two. Made more sense. The Deut. opts for one. Sounds mad. But he says that the God he's speaking for says the same thing. So he's not making this up. That's the same option confronting us at VT, isn't it? One God or two? Pastor King seemed to take the double option: Light vs. Darkness and no one deity beyond them, declaring "Both Light and Darkness are MY creatures." Biggest "real absence," of course, was not naming the Name of the one who Shines into the darkness and wins. When that one remains nameless, Darkness wins, despite the contrary claim of the campus pastor. I'm not making this up, either. It's in the NT.*

Why do you (we all) feel so compelled to get our God detached from it, when that God says the opposite? Sounds bizarre for us to feel called to defend God's reputation in the very face of his claims that we think incriminate him. Can't God see that that is bad PR? But who is on the bench, and who is in the dock in this world courtroom? That's gotta be a symptom of some malady of ours, doesn't it? We've got a problem, not finally about VT, but about our de facto deity, isn't that what it amounts to?

"Exactly how?" you ask. When you, colleague, will be able tell me "exactly how" God is in the mix in Amos' "laundry list" in chapter 4—"I did this, I did this, I did this...." then I'll have a clue for the "exactly how" at VT. Is this why Luther often talked about the stuff of creation as "masks" of God? I bet it

was. God's on the scene, but it also looks like someone else. Can't be God! Seems to me that this is equal to the proper distinction between law and gospel for Lutherans, namely, the distinction between deus absconditus and deus revelatus when Lutherans do "God-talk." That distinction is fundamental for theologizing about VT. And it seems to me to be equally "fundamental" for "natural man/woman" to ignore that when talking about VT. We're surfeited with such VT talk.

Where in all the public coverage of VT when God might have gotten mentioned, did you ever hear someone call on this hidden/revealed-God distinction? Even from church people? Even from Lutherans?

In Lutheran theological perspective VT was a massive encounter with deus absconditus (for the victims, for the survivors)—about whom we are unable (possibly even forbidden) to determine "exactly how." Luther heard a big No! from God for us trying to peek behind the masks. Said so when he exegeted the OT text about Moses being (graciously) hidden in the cleft of the rock so that he could not see the face of God, see "exactly how" God looked. All Moses got was (that whimsical term) "posteriora dei"—as ML says in his Heidelberg Theses. "God's hinder parts." Between deus absconditus and deus revelatus in Christ—although it is one and the same God (Christians are "stuck" with monotheism)—there is a great gulf fixed.

I sense that with your "exactly how" question, you are asking a fundamentally cause/effect sequence question. God as creator is not hooked to cause/effect sequences. We humans may well be unable to operate otherwise. [Kant thought so.] That's not what the Biblical word "Creator" means, nor the Hebrew create-verb "bara," as I understand it.

As soon as you put God into a cause/effect sequence, as Werner

Elert demonstrates in his dogmatics, you have to ask Who caused God? Which is akin to searching for some other God. And the “real” reason for doing that is to escape the God who addresses us in the masks of creation—both the good ones and the horrible ones. The cause/effect series is endless. My hunch is that this is the reason why Tillich preferred to call God the “Grund des Seins,” ground of being. Not cause, but ground—where we come from, whatever it is that keeps us from splattering all over the place. “Source,” possibly, might be a fair English term, as in a spring flowing from some “Ur-grund,” most of which is unavailable for our examination. But then, of course, it is WE who are under examination—as Jesus noted at Siloam.

*If I follow your logic correctly, because death is God's agent (God's left hand working), and as the gunman at Virginia Tech was death's agent, then he is also God's agent. Which means the back yard abortionist is also God's agent as was Rudolf Hoess, commander at Birkenau. The 33 lives lost at Virginia Tech and 250 000 lives lost at Birkenau and the one million plus lives lost to abortion each year in the US are simply unfortunate collateral damage in God's intended aim of bringing people to repentance.*

“Simply” sounds a tad gratuitous. But more to the point, I’ll speak to your concluding words about “God’s intended aim”: Here you are short-circuiting, I think, the Biblical witness. ONE of God’s aims—so we believe because we believe Christ (and not just on the basis of some “generic faith” in God “niceness”)— is that “all should repent.” All are sinners, so no exceptions. Biblically, an “innocent” human, if we ever met one, would not (could not) die. For all generic sinners their death is the rightful, logical (theological) end of the equation. I.e., as AC 2 says “All men born after the fall of Adam . . . are born IN sin . . .which brings death.” So even for repentant and Christ-

trusting sinners) death is still the “wages due.”

The difference between a Christ-trusting sinner and a Christ-distrusting sinner at the point of death is that, although both die a sinner’s death (the only sort of human death there is), the Christ-truster has a connection to a Partner in that dying—and that Partner makes all the difference. As that Partner himself once described it, “though he die, yet shall he live.” Or, though he encounter deus absconditus, yet his faith in deus revelatus shall have the last word.

The Biblical word from way back in Genesis 2 is “when you become a sinner, you shall surely die.” The operational word there is justice, equity justice—in simple English “fairness.” Next to the scandal of the Gospel (and actually linked to it) is this scandal: There are no “innocent” sinners. The two terms hooked together are an oxymoron. That was the scandal where the Pharisees stumbled. They trusted that they were (mostly) innocent, so repentance was not for them.

*From that Biblical base ALL human deaths are sinners terminating, going back—even more severe—being terminated, being sent (by You Know Whom!) back to the dust. Psalm 90.*

Sounds grim, maybe even heartless. Unjust even, when measured “kata sarka,” by human standards. But there are warnings throughout the NT for using such yardsticks, and in the OT for pots that critique the Potter.

*But, are we all kidding ourselves? Because [the Cross] is not only where God was, is it? He was there at Virginia Tech visiting death upon those students. He was there pulling the trigger in order that the survivors of his left handed deeds might recognize their need for his right handed deeds on the cross.*

Isn't this cause-and-effect stuff with God? As plausible as that analysis may seem, it ignores deus absconditus reality and deus absconditus theology. And once more—seems to me—it trivializes the Hidden God reality in the whole mess by intimating (with, I sense, a tad of ridicule about such a “simple” notion) that God is doing this “merely” to get survivors to repent. I spoke to this above, I think.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

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## **Bill O'Reilly, Culture Warrior, a Book Review**

Colleagues,

Don Schedler is on the same graduation class picture as I am – “Concordia Seminary – Class of 1954.” In the 53 years since then he's been a Lutheran pastor (South Dakota, Kansas and Indiana), has gotten a Ph.D. (Counseling Psychology), and has been in that area of pastoral ministry for 3 decades, specializing in marital and family therapy (New York and Missouri). Now retired and living in California, he's “working on my golf handicap,” he says, and also serving now and then as “interim pastor/vacancy pastor” for both (sic!) ELCA and LCMS congregations in and around Sacramento. Hospice chaplain ministry is also part of his weekly routine. Don keeps his eyes open to what's going on in American culture. Couple months ago he asked me when I was going to “say something” about Bill O'Reilly. Always trying to avoid work, I replied immediately, “Why don't you do it?” He did. Here it is.

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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**A book review: *CULTURE WARRIOR*, By Bill O'Reilly  
(Broadway Books: New York, 2006).**

**219 pp., index. Hardcover,**

**\$26 [Amazon.com prices: \$16.38 new, \$10.99 used]**

*"Caution! You are about to enter THE no spin zone." Thus Mr. O'Reilly (hereafter O'R) begins The O'Reilly Factor every evening on cable TV, the Fox News Channel (FNC), where he has presided as a news editorialist for the last 10 years. In that time his program has become the most watched of all the cable news programs. His "no spin" mantra has no doubt contributed to that success, and his crusade to "look out for the folks" has led him to be hard on child predators and lenient judges alike. His latest book, Culture Warrior, has been on the NY Times Non-Fiction best seller list for at least 16 weeks, (# 1 for a while) and his previous books – The O'Reilly Factor: The Good, the Bad, and the Completely Ridiculous (2000), The No Spin Zone (2001), Who's Looking Out For You? (2003) and The O'Reilly Factor For Kids: A Survival Guide for America's Families (2004)–all reached best-seller status.*

*So who is O'R, and why should we care? First of all, he's a very successful broadcast journalist with both his cable news show and a radio talk show (who thinks of talk show host, Rush Limbaugh, e.g., as an "entertainer") who has a lengthy history of reporting the news from all over the world, and, secondly, as a widely published author, he has a mature viewpoint that is informed by what he calls "the Judeo-Christian philosophy." He*



invokes this “philosophy” regularly when fighting the “Merry Christmas war” and other jousts with those whom he labels “secular-progressives,” and so, influential as he seems to be, he deserves a look from any in the Christian camp who have a concern for the direction of culture in our country.

O’R was born about 55 years ago to Irish Catholic parents in New York and attended Roman Catholic schools through high school and Marist College (Poughkeepsie, NY) where he majored in history. He was athletic enough to play football in college and semi-pro baseball afterwards, even trying out for the NY Mets as a pitcher. He has earned two masters degrees, one in Broadcast Journalism (1976) from Boston U., and one in Public Administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard in ’97, where he conceived the basic plan for his TV show at FNC. He has a number of “firsts” in journalistic reporting (following a two-year stint teaching high school in Miami) as he moved from news rooms in Miami to Scranton, to Dallas, to Denver, to Portland (OR), to Hartford, to Boston, and to New York City. He worked with the late Peter Jennings (whom he still admires) on ABC World News Tonight, then moved to CBS on Inside Edition for six years, and finally to FNC, having picked up two Emmys along the way. He’s married and has two children.

When O’R writes, then, about the culture he writes as a Roman Catholic layman who attends Mass regularly and is not shy about relating that fact. But when he puts the term “Warrior” alongside the word “Culture,” is he consciously playing to the “prayer warrior” folks, and does he thereby lose some folks who are too peaceful to be warriors? At least we can assume that he is building upon the “culture war” theme coined who knows when or where.

The author divides Americans into two categories early in his

book – “traditionalists” (or, later, T-warriors) and secular-progressives (or S-P’s). He asserts that these two entities are not equal to the labels “conservatives” and “liberals,” but finds some of each of the latter two among the T’s and the S-P’s. Traditionalists are those , “like [O’R] ...who believe the United States was well-founded and has done enormous good for the world,” while the “committed forces of the secular progressive movement ... want to change America dramatically: mold it in the image of Western Europe.” Throughout the book O’R’s definition of the traditionalist does not rise to anything like a follower of what is known in the Christian church as “The Great Tradition,” nor does he show any awareness of Pelikan’s distinction between “tradition” and “traditionalism” in the thin 1984 volume titled *The Vindication of Tradition*. There Jary Pelikan famously declares that “tradition is the living faith of the dead” while “traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”

For O’R traditionalism is based in the Constitution of the US which allowed individual achievement and made us a generous, brave and liberating nation while becoming the strongest and most prosperous nation ever. Indeed he does see flaws in the early fathers of our country and notes that “[a]ll of us are sinners,” but even so “most sinners are fundamentally good people” who are trying to do the right thing. This viewpoint would seem to place O’R’s main thrust in the arena of what Martin E. Marty calls (following José Ortega y Gasset) “civic pedagogy” or possibly even “civil-religious pedagogy.”

In fact, fast forward to the end of his final chapter, where “the code of the traditional warrior” is spelled out:

- Keep your promises.
- Focus on other people, not yourself.
- See the world the way it is, not the way you want it to

be.

- Understand and respect Judeo-Christian philosophy.
- Respect the nobility of America.
- Allow yourself to make fact-based judgments.
- Respect and defend private property.
- Develop mental toughness.
- Defend the weak and vulnerable.
- Engage the secular-progressive opposition in a straightforward and honest manner. [p. 206]

Who of us could argue with that?

Having then a tome zealously pushing what this reviewer would call a civil righteousness theme, we can possibly see why he accuses the S-P's of holding out that a widespread belief in a higher power in our nation is one of the causes of social injustice. He sees the S-P's wanting to take "under God" out of the pledge of allegiance and "In God we trust" off our legal tender. They have taken over large parts of the print media and most of Hollywood. This gives us group-think on the editorial pages and immorality on both the wide screen and the cathode ray tube. Secularism dominates the ACLU and has made that organization very dangerous, especially when its attorneys defend, pro bono, outfits like NAMBLA. Lenient judges let heinous sex crimes against children go practically unpunished – O'R derides the new catch phrase, "restorative justice," – and he has pushed hard for state after state to adopt the so-called "Jessica's Law" – named after Jessica Lunsford who was kidnapped by an unregistered sex offender neighbor in Florida, repeatedly raped, and then buried alive in the rapist's back yard. (That offender was recently found guilty by a jury of his peers.) Over half of the states in the US now have on the books mandatory 25-year sentences for such offenders.

So it is a real war in which he engages, as O'R sees it, and he

*invites his readers to join in. He himself and his ancestors come from a warrior clan in Ireland, but strangely he adopts a Chinese warrior's how-to book, Sun Tzu's The Art of War, as his guide, and even affects the name, "O'Reilly Tzu" in admiration. Then he takes to quoting epigrams at the heads of chapters, most of them from what appears to be a fictitious The Art of Culture War, by "O'Reilly Tzu," e.g. (Chapter Four), "To conquer a nation, destroy the values of its people." But of course that's exactly what he thinks is going on – traditional values in our great land are being destroyed by the S-P's, and that has to stop or there will be serious consequences for future generations.*

*The author gets quite specific about the S-P's. Traditionalists adhere to the Ten Commandments of Moses, but S-P's have developed a new set of ten – their own! And here they are:*

- *Thou Shalt Not Make Any Judgment Regarding Most Private Personal Behavior. Man/Woman Is the Master/Mistress of the Universe and His/Her Gratification Is Paramount.*
- *Thou Shalt Not Worship or Acknowledge God in the Public Square, for Such an Exposition Could Be Offensive to Humankind.*
- *Thou Shalt Take from the Rich and Give to the Poor. No Private Property Is Sacrosanct.*
- *Thou Shalt Circumvent Mother and Father in Personal Issues Such as Abortion and Sex Education in Public Schools.*
- *Thou Shalt Kill if Necessary to Promote Individual Rights in Cases of Abortion and Euthanasia.*
- *Thou Shalt Be Allowed to Bear False Witness Against Thy Neighbor if That Person Stands Against Secular Humanism.*
- *Thou Shalt Not Wage Preemptive War in Any Circumstance.*
- *Thou Shalt Not Impede the Free Movement of Any Human Being on Earth. All Countries Should Be Welcoming Places*

*Without Borders.*

- *Thou Shalt Not Prohibit Narcotics or Impede Personal Gratification in This Area.*
- *Thou Shalt Not Limit the Power of Government in Order to Provide "Prosperity" to All. [pp.70,71]*

*If you doubt that this libertine thinking exists, O'R cites a favorite source, The New York Times, and labels it "holy writ for the secular-progressive movement." This newspaper's ethicist is Randy Cohen, a former gag-writer for Rosie O'Donnell's defunct TV talk show, a man who has no formal training in theology, law, or philosophy. On the matter of what to do about drug dealers in your neighborhood Randy's advice is to "be reluctant to invoke laws that can be both inflexible and ineffectual." In other words, O'R believes Cohen is saying "that good people should decide for themselves what laws should be obeyed." So what kind of country do we want? One where moral relativism is touted on the pages of the presumptive best newspaper in the country? Or not?*

*The author goes on, in part two of his book, to illustrate some if not all of these ten unholy commandments as they are being followed today. E.g., he highlights the "separation of church and state" argument as a bogus one when it comes to the use of the word "Christmas."*

*He asserts that the S-P's are in favor of both abortion and euthanasia, thus targeting the most vulnerable in our society.*

*He points out the pitfalls in fighting as a T-warrior and illustrates how he feels he "lost" against Terri Gross of National Public Radio's "Fresh Air" because he raised his voice in making his "winning points." He believes, by the way, that NPR is a bastion of S-P-ism, and excoriates especially Bill Moyers for carrying the water for the S-P philosophy. In the war on terror he sees a struggle between good and evil, but*

believes the S-P's are hopeless utopians while the T-warriors have the Bible on their side.

O'R further illustrates S-P thought by naming celebrities and detailing shoot-outs he has had with some of them, like George Clooney, Michael Moore, Susan Sarandon, Alec Baldwin, Nancy Pelosi, et al. The worst part, he says, is that they will not be persuaded, convinced, or mollified by sound argument.

The author is afraid that the philosophy of "moral relativism" which has replaced Christianity in Europe will migrate to our shores now under the push of the S-P's. This philosophy says that "there is no absolute truth, no certain right and wrong. Everything is 'relative.'" He faults the Roman Catholic Church in Europe for thus far being a non-factor in the culture war.

All of this has made enemies. O'R receives threats of great harm, even death. He has hired security. He does not allow pictures to be taken of his family or residence. Google his name and one of the first items (of about 334,000) reads, "Sweet Jesus, I Hate Bill O'Reilly" under which you will find a self-professed atheist who does a hate-filled review of *Culture Warrior*, as well as a daily rebuttal of O'R's positions. This reviewer saw one tab labeled "Anti-O'Reilly" with some 138,000 items identified under it.

Now when it comes to defining traditional Americans and Judeo-Christian Philosophy, it is a bit hard to see what the author means, outside of his T-warrior code cited above. He does write, quoting Dr. Martin Luther King from his Letter from a Birmingham Jail:

"Did I read that right? 'Our Judeo-Christian heritage'? ... Dr. King understood that to mean the traditional tenets of freedom for all, justice for all, and generosity of spirit and with material things." (p.145)

*Then, as he bemoans the fact that Christian groups are "outgunned" by the S-P's, O'R opines that non-religious Americans have to be led back to traditionalism because it is in their best interest.*

*"The most powerful nonreligious argument against the S-P agenda is that it is simply better public policy for the United States to stay close to the vision of the Founders, which includes independence from big government, hard work, personal responsibility, and looking out for your neighbor." [p. 174]*

*So it is not the Christian religion (though he wishes Roman Catholic priests would take a stand) but the Judeo-Christian philosophy which will lead the way if we only promulgate it. O'R believes that the founders of our republic wanted "God-fearing" principles to be in place which would keep people in line as a practical matter of governing, while current S-P's claim the opposite, namely, that spirituality was, and is, to be a purely private matter.*

*Taken as a whole, while re-reading Culture Warrior this reviewer regularly found himself thinking of off-ramps to other writers such as C.S. Lewis in *The Abolition of Man*; H. Richard Niebuhr in his *Christ and Culture*; Ernest Becker in his final work *Escape From Evil*; and others already mentioned above. I find support for O'R's division of people into two camps from Pope Benedict XVI, cited by Mustafa Akyol in the March '07 issue of *First Things*:*

*"The true contrariety which characterizes the world of today is not that among diverse religious cultures, but that between the radical emancipation of man from God, from the roots of life, on the one hand, and the great religious cultures on the other." [FT, # 171, p.15]*

While not the exact bifurcation O'R likes, yet this quote has secularization on one pole, as O'R does. The other pole – "great religious cultures" – doesn't quite fit, since O'R thinks of the US as a Christian nation. What is missing in both classifications is any motivation other than law for Americans to do good works – just do right because it's the right thing to do. For those of us who live and die by the gospel of Christ, this is not sufficient.

Melanchthon's discussion in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession in the articles on justification and free will distinguishes clearly between just doing right (civil righteousness) and the righteousness which is by faith. He writes,

"God wants those who live according to the flesh to be restrained by such civil discipline, and to preserve it he has given laws, learning, teaching, governments, and penalties. And to a certain extent, reason can produce this righteousness by its own powers... God even honors it with temporal rewards. Still, it ought not to be praised at Christ's expense." (The Book of Concord, Apology IV, Kolb & Wengert, p. 124:22-24)

In a somewhat different context and much earlier in the Christian era, Justin Martyr (who was converted to Christianity in 132 A.D.) also appealed to reason in the prolog of his First Apology before the Emperor Antoninus Pius. He said to the emperor, "Men truly pious and philosophical are led by their reasons to honor and love only what is true, and refuse to follow traditional opinions, when they are false. ...the lover of truth himself must always, even under the threat of death, and regardless of his own life, choose to do and say what is right." Addressing the emperor in that manner assumes a



*righteousness of reason on the emperor's part to which one can appeal in the sphere of political and cultural discourse. Might such an appeal to reason as a motivation describe O'R's work?*

*O'R sets out to urge a Judeo-Christian philosophy upon us, and thus it may not be fair to hold him to a higher standard, i.e. to ask him to navigate between two separate motivations. One can question, however, whether his push toward civil righteousness by means of reason will bear fruit. Certainly as a #1 best seller for umpteen weeks, and now in April number 21 on the NYTimes list, his argument, bolstered by illustrations of outrages upon "the folks," has gained traction in the public's mind.*

*Yet one cannot read this book without becoming fearful for the rising generations of Americans if the "emancipation of man from God" (Benedict XVI) into a totally secular society is imported from Europe to the new world. To be sure, no one can be thus "emancipated," for each of us constructs our own god (so Luther, Large Catechism, First Commandment). But O'R's urgency in encouraging right behavior by means of a civil righteousness, captured in this book's T-warrior code, ought not to be missed, especially as O'R does not call on church leaders to attempt to "speak truth to power" or otherwise try to be "prophetic" in the public square. Rather he is speaking "to the folks" and encouraging us as citizens to keep his reading of the original thrust of our Founding Fathers alive and strong, that being defined in his mind (as earlier and agreeing with M.L.King): freedom for all, justice for all, generosity of spirit, hard work, personal responsibility, and looking out for your neighbor.*

*I was thinking Luther might approve, but now I'm not sure he would. An old, old friend of mine (did I say "old?") who peeked at this typescript, suggested a metaphor of Luther's that I had*

not recalled in this context. It's the one about the two foxes running in exactly opposite directions – one fox being the 16th C. Roman traditionalists, the other being the radical Schwärmer. Luther said if you look closely, you see that their tails are tied together! Could it be that O'R's "T-warriors" and "secular-progressives" have their tails tied together?

Looking again at the "codes" of the T's and the S-P's one sees exhortations, thou shalt's, and thou shalt not's – law – but where to find the power to do them we are not told, except to respect the philosophy which presumably made this country great and whose greatness is slipping away into a secularism which destroys that Judeo-Christian philosophy.

It is Saturday of Holy Week as this reader does a final edit of this review; the LBW daily lectionary for today presents, as a Reading III, these words of Paul to the Romans, ch. 8: "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh...." This condemnation found its completion on the cross in the flesh of Jesus, and so say also commentators G. Stöckhardt and Anders Nygren. Here we have much more than a philosophy – we have new life given by the Spirit of God and power to set our minds on things of the Spirit. Paul continues, "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot;...."

Such an impossibility would seem to doom O'R's project. But, again, is it fair to hold him to a standard not contemplated in his program when he set out to write? Coming back to Melancthon, one might wonder if his discussion of civil righteousness under the head of justification in the Apology will help toward an answer. At the point of discussing what constitutes true righteousness, he introduces the righteousness of the law (or the righteousness of reason) because of how

easily it masquerades as the real thing. While praising “honorable works prescribed in the Decalogue,” Melanchthon asserts that it is “... false that people are accounted righteous before God because of the righteousness of reason.” (Kolb & Wengert, p. 124:26.) So the Apology is clear that two motives for doing good are right reason and right faith, the first being for “those who live according to the flesh” and the second motive being the trust in Christ which moves us to love. O’R is addressing the first – in his book he does not (cannot?) take us toward Christ – how well he uses right reason is the question.

Even Niebuhr in his (Calvinistic?) reading of Luther’s take on cultural goals can be faulted for not distinguishing between the two kinds of motive mentioned by Melanchthon. Here’s how Niebuhr summarized Luther’s “non-parallelistic dualism” in Christ and Culture chapter five, “Christ and Culture in Paradox:”

“More than any great Christian leader before him, Luther affirmed the life in culture as the sphere in which Christ could and ought to be followed; and more than any other he discerned that the rules to be followed in the cultural life were independent of Christian or church law. Though philosophy offered no road to faith, yet the faithful man could take the philosophic road to such goals as were attainable by that way.” [p. 174]

His phrase “independent of Christian or church law” is suspect in the way it mixes up people of faith with people of reason. It is exactly church law (the Decalog) that is for people of reason (living acc. to the flesh) in God’s left-hand administration of society, while for those under the Gospel there is no law except that which always accuses.

To be sure, those who attempt to do right(eously) will find that they end up being accused by such an impossible-to-keep decalog as O'R proposes, or else their consciences will excuse them (Rm. 1). Without Christ such accusation leads to despair – without Christ such excusing leads to self-righteousness. It has been opined that we Americans already have enough of the latter. Would despair of doing right(eously) have a good outcome for our nation?

If he succeeds in his campaign, Mr. O'Reilly may have awakened “the folks” to either self-accusations or self- righteousness. Would either of these be good for the U.S. of A.? To be awakened by the accusations of the law of God – could we thereby be led to repentance?

Taken as a push toward civic-righteousness, Culture Warrior may have some value for “the folks,” even usefulness not contemplated by the author. Taken as a cure for the culture woes of our day, it does not go far enough in its diagnosis for the person in Christ. (E.g., O'R's take on sinfulness noted earlier betrays his Roman Catholic roots in that he believes, really, we're all fundamentally pretty good folks.) But taken as part of a conversation in the sphere of the common people, it may be delineating the twin dangers of the loss of the best of the past – call that tradition – and the advent of a stifling strait jacket of politically correct speech and conduct which wants to push the voice of right and wrong out of the public square – call that secular-progressivism.

A culture war exists. Whether one wants to be, as the author defines them, a T-warrior (in spite of certain ‘war’ connotations) or a secular-progressive, or none of the above, I leave to anyone interested in picking up on O'R's obviously popular productions in radio, TV, and print media. He does seem to be a present force to be reckoned with (among a number of

*other authors following in his train) in a discussion of our current culture.*

*Don Schedler*

*Cameron Park, CA*

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# **What NOT to say After the Virginia Tech Massacre**

Colleagues,

This is an open letter to William King, ELCA Campus Pastor at Virginia Tech. According to the ELCA news release—copied below—King spoke “the Christian message” at the campus convocation the day after the massacre. Not clear, but not unlikely, there were other voices offering the “X” message from their faith communities. The text of King’s Christian message is copied below from the news release. The Audio of King’s message is available at <http://media.ELCA.org/audionews/070417.mp3>

## **ELCA NEWS SERVICE**

**April 17, 2007**

### **ELCA Pastor Delivers Christian Message at Virginia Tech Convocation**

CHICAGO (ELCA) – The Rev. William H. King, Lutheran campus pastor at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), Blacksburg, Va., and staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), delivered the Christian message April 17 at the Virginia Tech Convocation where

students, faculty and others of the community gathered to remember the victims of yesterday's shooting on campus. According to the Virginia Tech Web site, at least 33 people died including the gunman.

"We're gathered this afternoon for many purposes. To weep for lost friends and families, to mourn our lost innocence, to walk forward in the wake of unspeakable tragedy, to embrace hope in the shadow of despair, to join our voices and our longing for peace, healing and understanding which is much greater than any single faith community, to embrace that which unifies, and to reject the seductive temptation to hate," said King, who also serves as deployed staff of the Department for Campus Ministry, ELCA Vocation and Education.

"We gather together weeping, yes, we weep with an agony too deep for words and sighs that are inexpressible, but also we gather affirming the sovereignty of life over death. At a time such as this the darkness of evil seems powerful indeed. It casts a pall over our simple joys, joys as simple as playing Frisbee on the Drill Field. We struggle to imagine a future beyond this agony. If we ever harbored any illusions that our campus is an idyllic refuge from the violence of the rest the world, they are gone forever. And yet we come to this place to testify that the light of love cannot be defeated. Amid all our pain, we confess that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it," said King.

[Added at this point from the audio- "We cannot do everything, but we can do something. We cannot banish all darkness, but we can by joining together push it back."]

"We cannot undo yesterday's tragic events, but we can sit in patient silence with those who mourn as they seek for a way forward. As we share light one with another, we reclaim our

campus. Let us deny death's power to rob us of all that we have loved about Virginia Tech, this our community. Let us cast our lot with hope in defiance of despair," said King, who invited the convocation to a moment of silence.

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Dear Pastor King,

I'd say you blew it.

It may be that you did indeed say more than the publicized words we got in the ELCA news release—and from the audio they sent us to. But did you notice? Neither the word God nor the word Christ ever appears. So how can that be THE Christian message for the survivors? Whose side are you on?

The Good News you offered (unless there was stuff edited out of your prose) is not even good Judaism or Islam.

But what was the good news you offered? I ask you to read your own prose again and then articulate for yourself—and for us—just what it was that you offered the folks. Especially if you were billed as THE Christian spokesman. Here's what I see:

- A. Your diagnosis of the survivors in their dilemma: "weeping . . . mourning . . . shadow of despair . . . agony too deep for words . . . sighs inexpressible . . . darkness of evil seems powerful indeed . . . casts a pall (even over frisbee-playing) . . . we struggle . . . illusions about our idyllic campus are gone.
- B. Where you sought to bring these folks: to walk forward . . . to embrace hope . . . to join our voices & our longing for peace, healing and understanding . . . to embrace that which unifies . . . to reject seductive temptations to hate. . . affirm the sovereignty of life over death. . . to imagine a future beyond this agony . . . to push back

darkness.

C. The power to get them from A to B:

We come to this place to testify that the light of love cannot be defeated

We confess that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it

We cannot do everything, but we can do something

We cannot banish all darkness, but we can by joining together push it back

We cannot undo yesterday's tragic events, but we can sit in patient silence with those who mourn

As we share light one with another, we reclaim our campus

Let us deny death's power to rob us of all that we have loved about Virginia Tech

Let us cast our lot with hope in defiance of despair

Inviting the convocation to a moment of silence

Sounds like the Savivors vis-a-vis that horrendous dilemma are the survivors: "We can... Let us."

If you were actually asked to be THE Christian voice on the program, why did you fudge? Someone apparently wanted something explicitly Christian. And just 9 days after Easter you still must have had something left over that you could have spoken. If the program people just wanted you to proclaim the Gospel of American Pelagianism—"by our bootstraps WE can DO it!"—which I think you proposed, then you might have simply said: "Thanks, but no thanks. Not my job. My ordination vow commits me to a different Gospel. Can't do it."

One reason the Gospel of American Pelagianism "fits" in the paradigm you propose is that it can indeed bring folks from their "A" dilemma as you diagnose it to the restored "B" place you offer. It goes like this: (A) Folks are horrifically torn apart. Smashed humpty-dumpties. But not so smashed that the



pieces can't be put together again. And in your (B) goal-articulations you portray these smashed folks restored—doubtless with the eggshell fracture lines still patent here and there—but “whole” again. And the energy/power for that is our own resources. Broken eggs can self-restore. You tell us, “We can, we can, we can . . .”

Theologically analyzed there really wasn't a TOTAL eggshell smash, for there are resources left in the fragments that your “homily” calls upon to put humpty-dumpty back together again. Substantively that's really why Christ and his Good Friday and Easter were NOT necessary for you to bring into your message and bring your message to closure. I.e., your diagnosis of the dilemma was too shallow. Ala St. Paul, there was no “stinger” left in the death you portrayed. With death already stingerless, WE survivors can cope with the aftermath. ‘Course what about the 33 folks for whom death's sting on Monday was lethal?

Dunno what seminary you attended, but the profs surely made it perfectly clear that vis-a-vis death —“in the Christian message”— there is nothing “WE” can do to cope with it. At least nothing that WE (unassisted) can do to cope with it. That pertains both to our own death and to the death of others.

First of all in that authentic Christian message death is understood as an encounter with the original LIFE-giver. A negative encounter. A terminal encounter. Read the opening verses of Psalm 90 for the full grim specs. Paul summarizes Psalm 90 in those classic lines in I Corinthians 15 about death (last enemy), sin (the stinger) and God's law (the “dynamis” [dynamite] that connects the first two).

If death is indeed an encounter with God's dynamite (whether folks acknowledge it or not changes nothing about the fact) and the divine dynamite is against us, then we need an even better

dynamite to cope with it. Like Someone who has somehow already licked the death-law-sin syndrome. Our own bootstraps just won't do it. We CAN'T.

Ditto for your call "Let us deny death's power." You've got to be kidding, though you patently are not. Everyone of these folks you urge to deny death's power is going to die. So who's got power over whom? Who speaks the final "no" over whom? The last enemy has the last word—in not with a bang, then with a whimper. All this—according to the Christian message—part from Christ being in the mix. And since Christ is significant by his real absence in your message, you are deceiving your hearers. To say nothing of what you are doing with your original ordination vow as a Christian pastor.

Ditto for "we gather affirming the sovereignty of life over death." Apart from a Christ-connection that's pure B.S.

Here's some more: "our longing for peace, healing and understanding which is much greater than any single faith community, to embrace that which unifies." What is that reality which is "greater than any single faith community . . .that unifies"? Is it greater than the Christian Gospel of the faith community on whose behalf you were speaking? And how so does that whatever-it-is "unify?" Better you would have said that the sin-death-law syndrome is the REAL unifier for all the offspring of Eve and Adam. The Lutheran Confessions to which you are pledged make that claim.

And aren't you fudging here too? "Amid all our pain, we confess that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." If you are going to cite St. John's gospel prose, then you have to name the light in order not to deceive your hearers. When we ask, "Just what is that Light, pastor?" you "testify that the light of love cannot be defeated." That is an

“other Gospel” – and you must know that– an alternate light to the Light you are referencing in the citation from John.

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Enough for now. Except for this.

Only at one place do you speak of who/what was on the scene as the murderer rampaged. You speak of “the darkness of evil.” Once more, seems to me, you are closing out the God factor, God as actor in the carnage. As grim as that may seem at first, it has explicit Biblical precedents. Starting with Jesus himself when the folks asked about the death of innocent folks at the Siloam tower collapse and Pilate’s bloody massacre of Jews at worship to boot. Check it out in Luke 13, first paragraph. Jesus told the survivors–also crushed and humpty-dumptyed–to see the carnage for what it was. Of all things, a call for the survivors to repent. It would’ve taken some chutzpah on your part to do likewise, but isn’t that “the Christian message?” It comes straight from the Chief. It’s must be right. Yes, it’s not his last word, as I trust you know. But without that penultimate word, Christ’s ultimate word of gospel, of promissory mercy, is ho-hum.

[I won’t go into the larger context, but someone should. This “suicide murderer” at Virginia Tech sounds parallel to the umpteen “suicide-bombers” that our liberation of Iraq has unleashed on those now-oppressed-again Iraqis. Sure they are all (relatively) innocent. In both places. Yet who runs the “balance of payments” in world history? Who was it that said this? – “Vengeance is mine. I run the pay-back system (also for nations).”]

It’s not that repentance is a requirement, a “you gotta” before Christ’s Easter conquest of the sin-death-law syndrome will benefit you. Rather it’s that if you don’t see your own God-

problem, if you don't fess up and say "I too must turn around" when death strikes (either you or others), then the God-solution at Easter will be but an idle tale.

Pastor King, I will welcome and post to the Crossings community any response you may wish to send my way.

The gist of my grumblings above is this: You had a better Gospel for April 17 delivery. To wit, the Christian message. You should have used it. The folks needed to hear it. They still do. Use your campus pastor post to keep messaging that message. That's the real Good News for all of us to hear in order to cope with the Virginia massacre.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

St. Louis, Missouri

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## Preaching the Christian Gospel from Old Testament Texts

Colleagues,

At the Crossings "Honest to God Gospel" get-together last January, there was one "closed" session. While Sherman Lee and I were doing a "Word of God and My Daily Work" Crossings demonstration before the plenum, the Text Study staff writers, who crank out the weekly diagnosis/prognosis postings—Steps 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6—each week, were (like the disciples in this coming Sunday's Gospel) "behind closed doors." Doing what? Doing their own mini-conference for "moving into Sabbatheology Internet postings on texts from

the Old Testament."Up till now all the text studies offered over the past years—now all archived on the Crossings website: <[www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org)>— have been on the Sunday “gospel” pericopes from the Revised Standard Lectionary, with an occasional side-glance to the Second Reading for the day, a.k.a. the “Sunday epistle.” But now the team wants to tackle the Old Testament readings assigned for every Sunday and Feast Day. That’s not easy. If you think it is, then try to answer this question: What’s the difference between a Jewish sermon (for a synagogue congregation) and a Christian one (for a Christ-confessing congregation) on a text from Isaiah? Or Deuteronomy? Or Genesis?

They have not (yet) told me what happened in that “off limits” gathering. I did see (in advance) the teaser that Jerry Burce had circulated among them to get their conversation going. It’s now already 3 months old. I have his permission to pass it on to all of you. I think it’s pretty good.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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*To Sabbatheology Writers-On the Crossing of Old Testament Texts: Some Thoughts to Start the Discussion*

*Caveat: This is rough and hasty. Read it, please, with that in mind.*

## ***Part 1. On Sucking It Up. A Preliminary Consideration.***

- 1. In approaching the “crossing” of Old Testament texts, it is imperative that we commit ourselves at the outset to*

*the grieving of our preferred OT scholars.*

- 2. Said scholars, filling the chairs of mainline seminaries and divinity schools, insist on reading the OT documents on their own terms, without reference to the NT. We are not permitted to do that. Else Christ is not preached.*
- 3. And why does the Church read and study the OT if not for the preaching of Christ? One of our tasks-perhaps our chief task-will be to remind the Church of this.*
- 4. To use the OT for the preaching of Christ is not the same as "reading Christ" into the OT. My own teachers objected strenuously to this. "Do not pretend," said they, "that Isaiah, announcing that 'unto us a Child is born,' was thinking of Jesus." In saying this they were attacking a hoary interpretive tradition that took such claims for granted.*
- 5. This tradition, by the way, was not an apostolic tradition, but a skewed variant thereof. My teachers were right to back us away from it.*
- 6. Matthew, for example, does not assert that Jeremiah was predicting Herod's slaughter of the innocents when he wrote of Rachel weeping for her children. What he does say is that the slaughter "fulfilled" Jeremiah's word (Mt. 2:17). That is, it filled the word up, so to speak, with new content and ultimate meaning.*
- 7. Such moves-John and Luke are also fond of them-keep tipping us off to the chief apostolic point, namely that God's word is completed in Christ, and only on getting to Christ does one really "get" what that word is for and about. See esp. Lk. 24:26-27, 45ff.*
- 8. Today's exegetical guild is bound by its rules of procedure to dismiss this key apostolic point as fanciful and farfetched. This shouldn't surprise us. After all, those guild rules forbid the asking of the only question the apostles are interested in, namely "What has God done*

*about keeping his word?"*

- 9. Modern exegesis, remember, is an anthropocentric enterprise. Its key question is not "What has God said or done?" Instead it asks "What have men/women said that God has said or done?" In keeping with modernity it insists that the latter question is the only question that can be asked with any hope of arriving at a dependable answer.*
- 10. Preaching, by contrast, is a theocentric enterprise. At its core is the very question the exegetes refuse on principle to touch.*
- 11. Thus the exegete is bound by her rules to ask "What does Isaiah (whoever he may be) imagine God to be saying, and why?"*
- 12. By contrast the preacher is bound by her rules to ask "What is God saying to us through Isaiah?" And if a Christian preacher, she'll also ask "What has God done in Christ to 'fill up' what he says through Isaiah?" See, e.g., the evangelist Philip preaching to the Ethiopian (Acts 8).*
- 13. The preacher who fails to ask these questions is no preacher at all, but a charlatan who is wasting the time of the congregation he preaches to and defrauding it of the salary it pays him.*
- 14. The apostles were preachers. So were the prophets. So are we. All of us are equally bound, therefore, to dismay the exegetes. Let us do so with verve and joy, in happy imitation of Peter, Paul, John, and the synoptic evangelists-and, yes, the aforementioned Philip.*

## **Part 2. On the Task Proper. Some First Thoughts.**

- 15. In approaching OT texts we do well to think not of Law and Gospel but of Law and Promise.*
- 16. Of Law there is much in these texts. Dreadfully. Micah*

6:8 is a good example. And of Promise there is just as much. Wonderfully. See Jer. 31:31-34. Some texts are marvelously double-edged, dreadful Law and wonderful Promise interlaced. Check out Isaiah 55:11.

17. Gospel is the post-OT announcement of Law and Promise alike fulfilled in the cross, albeit in very different ways.
18. The Law fulfilled is a) the Law exposed, the enormity of its threat made evident through its killing of our representative at our own rebellious hands. It is also b) the Law defanged, its power to lay ultimate hurt on us absorbed in its ultimate hurting of Christ. Thus the import, e.g., of Christ's dying quotation of Psalm 22. "He screamed it for me"-that's Gospel.
19. The Promise fulfilled is the Promise secured and underwritten in the indelible blood of the One for us. Example: see the Promise-rich text of Advent 3, Zeph. 3:14-20. One can make a double move with it. a) Read "Christ" where it says "the Lord God." b) Read "Christ" where it says "you," remembering that "Christ" is "Christ-for-us," the term thereby embracing all who are "in Christ." Notice how in either case the Promise blossoms into full-fledged Gospel, which in turn heightens the text's promissory impact. "These things shall be! How can they not be?"
20. So it is that OT crossings will move of necessity (and to the exegete's chagrin) beyond the bounds of the text itself into Christ-talk. The integrity of the crossing will be measured by whether and how well that Christ-talk is correlated with the categories in which the text either lays down the Law or holds out the Promise.
21. One way to maintain that integrity is to check for NT contexts in which the OT passage is quoted or alluded to, and, if available, to draw the Christ-talk from there.



22. Another way, always available, is to draw the Christ-talk from the Epistle or the Gospel for the day, both of which will be part of the preaching context. The minds behind the lectionary appear to have made a conscious effort to pair OT and Gospel texts, not always with equal success but almost always with some success. For an example of great success, see the texts for Lent 1, Series A, i.e. the succumbing of Adam and Eve to the tempter (Gen. 3) vs. Jesus' refusal to succumb (Mt. 4, with its patent connection via "if you are the Son of God" to Mt. 27), coupled with Paul's mention of "the one righteous act" by which all are made righteous (Ro. 5:18). Only the brain dead will fail to hit a home run here.
23. There are three crossings of OT texts on our web site. The first is a sermon by Bob Bertram on Psalm 118 (<https://crossings.org/thursday/2005/thur032405.shtml>). The second is a lengthy six-step study, also by Bob, of Isaiah 42:1-9 (<https://crossings.org/archive/bob/BaptismalCrossing.pdf>). The third is by the undersigned, a six-step study of Psalm 2, also lengthy and festooned with a fair amount of preliminary reflection (<https://crossings.org/thursday/2005/thur072105.shtml>). (My thanks to Ed Schroeder for pointing me to the Bertram pieces.)
24. As preparation for our writers' conclave at the conference, I respectfully urge a close reading of all three pieces, though with particular attention to the latter two, a) because of their six-step format, b) because both take time to address issues of methodology and hermeneutics, some of which, I suspect, we'll want to discuss at our meeting.

Jerome Burce

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# A Caveat for Maundy Thursday—Especially for ELCA Lutherans!

Colleagues,

On the eve of Maundy Thursday 2007 Jerry Burce, one of the pastors at Messiah Lutheran Church in suburban Cleveland, Ohio, sends me this eleventh hour “liturgy-alert” akin to the cyber-alerts that come our way these days when viruses are sneaking into our computers. This one sounds viral to me—sneaky too. What do you think? Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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*Last fall the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America rolled out its brand new Evangelical Lutheran Worship and urged congregations to start taking it for a ride. For those outside the ELCA orbit, ELW is that church body's new official liturgy-and-hymnbook, though its editors describe it more modestly as a core worship “resource” (p. 7), the main car in the driveway, so to speak, though not the only car. I'm glad they put it this way. It invites me and other ELCA pastors to do what some of us would do anyway, which it is to throw open the hood and start tinkering with the innards when the Check Engine light comes on. And sure enough, that's happening from time to time. A case in point is the Prayer of the Day, Option 2, for this week's*

*Maundy Thursday. It appears to be a thorough overhaul of Maundy Thursday's Option 2 in the preceding Lutheran Book of Worship, the overhaul done, one guesses, with an eye on recent ecumenical commitments to groups for whom the older LBW language-"this Sacrament of your body and blood"-is a bit too vivid.*

*Anyway, here's how the ELW version goes: "Eternal God, in the sharing of a meal your Son established a new covenant for all people, and in the washing of feet he showed us the dignity of service. Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit these signs of our life in faith may speak again to our hearts, feed our spirits, and refresh our bodies, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord..."*

*To which the discriminating Lutheran can only say "Aaargh!"*

*Off the top of my head, here are three reasons why the Check Engine light is glowing at this point.*

- 1. "...in the sharing of a meal." Is that "a meal" as in any old meal? It could be. It sure shouldn't be. Meals and the sharing thereof are the stuff of old creation, the standard mixed bag of blessing and curse. That's so not only of your garden variety Lutheran potluck, but also of that very special meal, the one that Jesus and his disciples actually shared that Thursday night. Passover, it's called. Came then The Meal, a brand new eating and drinking that took place "after the supper," i.e., when the old-creation sharing, chomping and slurping was done with. The operative verb for The Meal isn't "shared" but "given," its point and consequence being to connect us directly, specifically, and marvelously to the resurrected life of Jesus. ("This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you." "Is," not*

*“signifies.” Remember that, dear Zwingli.) That’s what makes The Meal so special, and the night of its instituting so eternally important.*

- 2. “...he showed us the dignity of service.” Really, is this what the foot-washing was about, an object lesson in thinking nicely, say, about the folks who pick up our garbage or wash our toilets? Seems to me that the point lies rather and precisely in the indignity of service, and in the fact that the Lord of heaven and earth undertook this for our sake, and expects that we too will eat dirt that others might participate with us in his life.*
- 3. “Grant that these signs” etc. So when and how did it happen among us that Holy Communion got demoted from “means of grace” to “a sign of our life in faith,” whatever that may mean? Or how is it that the foot-washing is suddenly on a par with the sacrament as a source of refreshment for body, soul, and spirit? Last I heard there was a qualitative difference between the two, a promise being attached to the one and not to the other.*

*If all this sounds like caviling and the picking of nits, that’s because it is. But then nits-baby lice, remember?-can be irritating, and too many of them will make a body sick. Too many careless words and sloppy thoughts in the Church’s prayer will do the same to the Body of Christ. That’s why I’m sticking with the LBW prayer this Maundy Thursday. It’s also why I plan to keep combing the ELW texts as I encounter them. I’m sure I’ll turn up more rubbish. Then again, I’m just as sure that I’ll run across some gems of faithful thought and fresh expression-lots of them, I trust. I’ll thank God when I do.*

*Jerome Burce*