

Being a Lutheran Risk-Taker in the 21st Century

Robin J. Morgan

Learning from our Forebears

We are a people who respect our traditions and our past. The Lutheran tradition has produced some of the foremost church historians of the 20th century: Sydney Ahlstrom, Jarislav Pelikan, and Martin Marty. These men, along with many others, have taught us that our history is full of riches that inform not only who we are today, but also provide part of the foundational realities for most of the denominations in our country. But how does this rich tradition translate into our 21st century culture?

We revere our forebears, the men and women who established the congregations that we hold so dear. We want to honor our parents and grandparents by preserving what they gave us and by emulating them. One way to do this is to freeze our congregations in time, keep everything just the way its been for as long as we can remember: the lutefisk and lefse dinners or the sausage suppers, refusing to learn new hymns, complaining about disrespectful teen-agers who don't know the Bible and their parents who don't make them come to church like parents used to do. All while the depressing statistics keep piling up.

Another way to honor our forebears is to look back and learn from them. We can take a hard look at who our predecessors were, how they struggled, failed and succeeded and learn from them – successes, failures and all. We can learn about the ground from which their ministries grew and flourished or were planted and

prematurely died. Either way, we can learn how we might engage our contexts today and tomorrow with the best of traditions we hold so dear. It's not impossible, it's just risky.

Which brings up a crucial point. Though we revere our forebears, we tend to have collective amnesia about the first step those brave women and men took in bringing their Lutheran faith to this country – they got on the boat. Whether in Germany, Norway, Denmark, Finland or Sweden, they took that scary first step toward a new life and they brought their faith with them. They got on the boat knowing that they would probably never again see their homelands and the loved ones they left behind. They took a huge risk, leaving everything familiar behind and their lives were changed forever.

Do we have what it takes to risk the way our forebears did? Yes we do because of the resources they have given us. In this paper I'll be looking at some of our theological resources through the writings of one of our forebears, Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., and through my own experiences working in the city of St. Louis. By focusing on the church in the world, Caemmerer gave us a theological springboard to move into the 21st century using the theological resources of Law and Gospel to enlighten our footsteps.

Care and Redemption

To begin this journey, I want to clarify what theological resources I'm referring to before we delve into Caemmerer's work and my experience. Two words, **care** and **redemption**, can be used to characterize the two main responsibilities that God has given to Christians. These words may seem like synonyms or may seem like they have nothing to do with each other, but together they sum up the ways that God works in the world. In the Lutheran Book of Worship, the second offertory prayer contains these two

theological seeds for ministry in the 21st century:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the **care** and **redemption** of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹

These two words, **care** and **redemption**, stem from Luther's breakthrough in understanding Scripture and led to a whole series of realizations in his life about the way God works in the world. Here is how Luther described this breakthrough late in life when asked what had set him on the road to become a Reformer:

For a long time I went astray and didn't know what I was doing. To be sure, I was onto something, but I did not know what it really was until I came to the text in Romans 1:17, "The one who through faith is righteous shall live." That text helped me. There I saw what righteousness Paul was talking about. The word stuck out in the text. I connected the abstract notion of righteousness with the concrete phenomenon of being righteous, and finally understood what I had here. I learned to distinguish between the law's kind of righteousness and that of the gospel. My previous reading was marred by but one defect in that I made no distinction between the law and the gospel. I regarded them to be identical and spoke as though there was no difference between Christ and Moses other than their location in time and their relative perfection. But when I found that distinction – that the law is one thing and the gospel is something else – that was my breakthrough.²

This Law and Gospel distinction became the touchstone not only for the way he interpreted the Bible, but for the way he looked at God's actions in the world.

Care from the offertory prayer is a task that God, through the law, expects all human beings to be about in the world. God gave Adam this task in Genesis 2:15 when “the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” Humanity, all of humanity, is called to **care** for God’s creation. Throughout Scripture, human beings are called to specific **care** tasks, particularly the care called for in primal relationships such as spouse, child, and parent, as well as the **care** of widows and orphans and the demand that all people conduct their lives honestly, doing so without taking unfair advantage of others. Micah 6:8 puts it this way: “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

We have this God-given job and much of the time, we’re lousy employees. The second use of the law is our six-month job review. It is through the knowledge of God’s law that we see our sinfulness, our separation from the Creator, in bold relief. This is the second use of the law, the theological use. As such, God’s law functions as judge, accuser and even executioner. “This is the primary purpose of the Law of Moses, that through it sin might grow and be multiplied, especially in the conscience...the chief and proper use of the Law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well-deserved wrath of God.”³

We may try to extricate ourselves from this situation by negotiating or hiding or blaming somebody else for our lousy work record, but, in the end, humanity is unable to change this state that God’s Law reveals to us. We don’t fear, love and trust God above all things so we end up not doing what God calls us to do as well. We don’t **care** for God’s creation and we try to cover up that reality. As a result of this profound disconnect between who we are called to be and how we live, we are driven

to look outside of ourselves for relief.

God knows we can't get out of this mess ourselves and so, we finally get to the good stuff, the verse that gets put on the fences at football games and scrawled on walls, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." This means that God loves me, wants an intimate, loving relationship with me so much that he is willing to send not just the employee of the month, but the employee for all eternity to take my mess onto himself, get fired instead of me, and give me his status as one of his co-employees of eternity. Jesus loves me and trusted our God so completely that he was willing to put his life in God's hands and say, "Not my will, but thine be done."

He bought us out of the mess we were in with his own life. That's what redemption means. **Redemption** is what Jesus Christ does for human beings who are subject to God's law – that is everyone. Luther tells us that as our Redeemer, Jesus Christ "has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and keeps us there...He has snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to the Father's favor and grace."4

How do we live out care and redemption in our context today? A first step is by looking at Caemmerer to see how he addressed these issues during his lifetime in the mid- 20th century.

Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr.

Caemmerer began talking about the church in the world early in his career. He talked about the need to address the context in which Christians are living in his 1938 article, "Lutheran Social Action," by highlighting the differences between his time

and the time of the Reformation:

The Reformation arose in a day when the Church was the dominant institution of the world not only religiously, but also politically and economically. From a fourth to a half of the real estate holdings of Europe were in the hands of the Church. Its endowments controlled many educational, commercial, charitable enterprises. Only in exceptional instances, chiefly in the law faculties, were instructors in the higher and middle schools of Europe other than ordained clergymen.⁵

He also highlighted the reality that, as an immigrant church, Lutherans had been focused on their own development and "for the most part [had] a narrowly horized social consciousness, with little participation in the affairs of a democratic commonwealth."⁶ Caemmerer believed that it was time to look beyond those initial immigrant realities to life as established members of their American communities.

He went on to say that the church needed to educate clergy and laity about the twofold purpose of the congregation:

To maintain Word and Sacrament for itself and spread it among new believers; and to provoke unto the good works which are the end and aim of the spiritual power engendered by the means of grace. Every use of the means of grace is to result, in home and congregational situations, in the development of spiritual power. This power is to be used; and the administration of the congregation is to direct these powers into valid channels. Permitted to be dissipated and unused, these powers become a blight on the Church's program.⁷

Without clergy support, any social action programs would be stillborn. Without laity support, much of that work would go undone and unfunded.

We can see Caemmerer beginning to build a Lutheran theological framework to address the issues of **Christian** interaction with the world. He reached back to the Reformation and, using his forebears' wisdom, began to develop the foundation that would eventually lead him far beyond his inherited mental and theological thought patterns.

By 1942 Caemmerer's theology included the need for the church to adapt in new contexts without losing itself. In his essay entitled "The Lutheran Church Faces the World," he wove together his concern for social issues with an anticipation of post-war realities for the church. Caemmerer's opening comments addressed this need for the church to adapt yet keep its foundational core intact. "All history has one lesson, which current world disorder is bringing into sharp focus: only useful institutions survive."⁸

He said that Lutherans have clear doctrine to offer the world, particularly justification by faith. However, having clear doctrine is not enough:

We rightly define justification as the center of our faith. But justification in the scheme of the Christian religion is not an end: it is a dynamic; it thrusts in the direction of the Christian life; it has a design and purpose in view, that the saved Christian should serve God and man with love. This service is not to be by compulsion; but is to be joyful, thrilling, wholehearted.⁹

To carry out this joyful responsibility Christian needed to be equipped with **three things** he said. The **first** was the knowledge of the plan of salvation that most Lutherans memorized in school. The **second** was faith in Christ, not merely in the classroom or chancel steps, but in all of life. The **third** was growth in love. With this equipment, the Christian can be about

“the high charge to show sodden, broken people the glory of God.”¹⁰

His most complete conversation on this topic was in his 1949 book, **The Church in the World**. Caemmerer’s focus throughout the book was on teaching the **Church** how to carry the good news of justification by grace through faith for Christ’s sake into the world – the world, not as challenge or menace, but the world as people “subjects and objects of the cosmic drama of salvation.”¹¹ He said that there are **two points** which were essential in this task. The **first** is *agape*, love, “by which the man of the world becomes alert to the fact that he needs help and that the Church has help to give.”¹² The **second** was the *kerygma*, the gospel message. This “second factor is the help itself, the answer of God Himself through the Church to the need of the world.”¹³ He said that it was not enough for the message to be received by the senses of the hearer. It must “register on the mind of the hearer.”¹⁴

Registering on the mind of the hearer was accomplished by the Christian as s/he participated in the lives of people outside the church through a variety of avenues: family, business, and citizenship. All of these areas of life were ripe for “Christian conditioning” – where *agape* in action drew the unbeliever to the Christian so that this individual wanted to hear what the Christian had to say. At that moment the Christian had an open door to speak the word of the redemption to a listening ear.

Caemmerer’s specifications about what were involved and how the Christian went about his tasks were all clear and readily understandable. However, all that he talked about in this book was focused on having the opportunity to speak the word of redemption. All of the **care** work that he articulated was done by the Christian with the express intent of telling someone about Jesus. The positive meanings of the first use of the law were no

where to be found. However, the clarity of his thought did open up a theological framework that can be used as part of the foundation for developing ideas to address more fully the issues of care and redemption in today's world.

Caemmerer was astute in looking at the world and then applying his theological knowledge to it. He offered the most comprehensive framework that theologically explained both the **care** and **redemption** work that was and still is, the church's responsibilities in the world. However, late in his life he still had questions that I want to look at next. I believe that these questions open the theological door to an underutilized theological resource in the Lutheran toolbelt that is necessary for us to do ministry in the 21st century – the positive meanings of the first use of the law.

Caemmerer's Questions

Of all Caemmerer's questions, the first one, *What is Christian love?* was most readily answered. His definition of Christian love, *agape*, was very clear:

It is the will of the Christian man bent and directed toward the good of the other, the other regardless of claim or chance of return. This love is always a personal thing. It is the response of the heart to the Kingdom or indwelling of God. It is in itself the reaching out of the individual heart to the next individual in need; it is simultaneously being sensitive to need, assuming responsibility for need, devising means of helping in need, sacrificing self for need, all without hope or intention of return.¹⁵

Caemmerer's next question was, *What of "the exercise of charity and good will carried on by the non-Christian?"*¹⁶ Is this also love? Here was the point at which the theological framework used

by Caemmerer broke down. There was no answer for these questions in his writings. His focus was on the actions of Christians who were already inside the fold of the church, who already knew the Gospel and were partaking of the means of grace.

Yet in Matthew 22 Jesus responds to the Pharisees' question, "Teacher, which commandment is the greatest?" by saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."¹⁷ **Jesus sets love as the keystone of the law.** Love of God and love of neighbor encapsulate the rest of the law. "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" are components of this love that the prophets and the priests of the Old Testament reiterated to the people over and over again. Acknowledging the Creator and caring for what He has given human beings to steward, acting in the best interest of the other is love.

All human beings, Christians and non-Christians, are capable of acting in the best interest of the other. No human being does it perfectly or all the time, but most people have acted in the best interest of the other at one time or another. Parents taking care of their children, spouses with each other, members within the same family – these are all examples of personal relationships in which any human being may act in the best interest of the other. Likewise, people, non-Christians and Christians, work for the betterment of their communities, take care of the environment, or participate in efforts for peace – again, examples of efforts made by many people, Christian or not, in the best interest of others.

Caemmerer's third question "*Conversely, is it Christian love when the **Christian** carries out some duties of care of others*

*under the direction of government, sometimes quite without his heart in it?"*¹⁸ This third question opens a door into the positive meanings of the first use of the law that can be particularly helpful for Christians today. No Christian, or any other human being, can always know their own motivation. Is this act of care inspired by the Holy Spirit? Is that act of care a matter of obeying the first use of the law? Do acts of care done by Christian love look inherently different from acts of care done as obedience to the first use of the law? These questions are subsets of Caemmerer's question and at the edge of our ability to find quantifiable answers. Nonetheless, I believe they are worth exploring. Maybe you think I'm splitting theological hairs for no particular reason other than that I've been thoroughly steeped in one of Lutherans' favorite indoor sports – ripping everybody else's theology apart. I don't think so. I think following this train of thought will help us begin to find some answers to 21st century questions that Lutherans have never had to address before. So bear with me.

Again, care of creation is the responsibility of all human beings. Whether the government supports a particular care program, whether a religious organization funds it, or whether community volunteers take care of it themselves, care is a human responsibility. So, when Christians participate in, even initiate such efforts, they are, first of all, fulfilling the first use of the law. The work needs to be done, is the responsibility of human beings, regardless of the motivation. When acts of care are done in the best interest of the other, they will not look differently if they're done by Christians, whether motivated by **Christian** love or obedience to the first use of the law, or by anyone else. Making sandwiches is making sandwiches, cleaning and pressing clothing is cleaning and pressing clothing, building a new house is building a new house. None of these things is inherently Christian or Buddhist or

Atheist.

Of course, there are times when the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is foremost in the Christian's life as s/he does acts of care. At such times, the **Christian** may have a unique contribution to make because of that inspiration. Certainly, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. made a unique contribution to the well-being of the United States because his faith in Jesus Christ inspired him to work in a unique way for civil rights. However, it is the prior claim of the Creator through the first use of the law that generated the responsibility to do such work. The civil rights themselves are not inherently Christian.

For Christians, care of creation work stands on both sides of the cross – both before, in the first use of the law and after, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Looking at care work from this dual vantage point can modify, maybe even eliminate, the sense of superiority that has plagued Christians throughout the years of Christendom. If Christian human beings' first responsibility to the Creator is shared with every other human being on earth, what is there to act superior about? Christians have been called to care for creation with all who are participating in that work. Working as partners, rather than as dominators is at least worth a try. Trying to dominate other cultures is no longer working.

Another result of using this theological tool (the positive meanings of the first use of the law) is that by working as partners with all people who are doing creation care work, Christians are freed to reclaim the word of redemption through Jesus Christ. A Christian need not minimize nor eliminate the Christ of faith from his/her life to lift up Jesus as example of right living. As stated above, **care work is on both sides of the cross**. It is woven deeply into the fabric of the Christian life as human beings and as Christians. It's not a matter of choosing

one or the other. God has already chosen Christians to be about **both care and redemption** work in the world.

The fourth question Caemmerer asked, *“Should the Christian view his government, on the national or the neighborhood level, as performing tasks of Christian love?”*¹⁹ The short answer to this question for citizens of the United States is no. Our government, though peopled with many Christians throughout its history, is not inherently Christian. It is a republic, based on Enlightenment principles, principles of reason. Again, Christians are responsible to participate as citizens according to the first use of the law. If in carrying out of that responsibility some unique inspiration comes to the Christian which helps in the execution of his/her duty that is a grace note. However, the Christian is responsible, as are all human beings, for participating as citizens in the processes of government.

Caemmerer’s last question, *“Is the answer to these questions simply the strict separation of church and state?”*²⁰ This question, like number four, can be answered briefly – no, there is much more at stake. However, the full force and ramifications of applying the positive meanings of the first use of the law to such matters is outside the limits of this paper. However, considering the urgent issues pressing upon this country at the beginning of the twenty-first century with regard to religious beliefs across the globe, this question and others like it deserve careful and deliberate scrutiny.

After looking at all of this information about compassionate, theologically-literate Lutherans of the 20th century, my question is why didn’t they see and use this Reformation theological tool that had been sitting in their tool box? I believe it’s because they didn’t need it. They lived inside a world that assumed Christian ethics as the basis for personal

behavior.

The tacit agreement between our republic and Protestant Christianity shaped their world. Protestant Christianity controlled the private realm of the citizenry and the State with its Enlightenment principles ruled in the public arena. The culture was split into two independently controlled domains.

This was a mutually beneficial arrangement for both sides. Protestant Christianity produced human beings instilled with a basic sense of ethical behavior and with the same basic set of stories that shaped their thinking. These behavior patterns and thought processes molded citizens who fit into the American way of life. In return, the church didn't have to pay taxes on its property nor fear government interference in its activities.

However, what has been happening with increasing rapidity since the 1960s is that many citizens are demanding that our country live up to its high ideals of equality for all people, whether they are white, male Protestant landowners or not. African-Americans, women, gays and lesbians, Hispanics and people of other religions have all, at one time or another, demanded that the United States put its money where its mouth is and reshape the culture to include all of its citizenry.

At the same time, Protestant Christianity has been losing its grip on its own people, particularly its youth, to say nothing of the general shift away from the church in the national population at large. Sally Morgenthaler, one of the original gurus of the mega-church movement admits: "For all the money, time, and effort we've spent on cultural relevance – and that includes culturally relevant worship – it seems we came through the last 15 years with a significant net loss in churchgoers, proliferation of mega-churches and all."²¹

Acknowledging this changing national landscape in which we live,

maybe it's time for Lutherans to embrace whatever persons God puts in our path who need care and yearn for a relationship with Jesus Christ whether they are German or Scandinavian or not. We have discovered solid Lutheran foundation in our care and redemption theology. This is the foundation on which we can stand without fear of sinking or losing our way. This is also the foundation from which we can reach out to people far beyond our comfort zone because we know that we are called, along with all people, to care for creation and have the added privilege of telling the world about Jesus when asked about the hope that is in us.

Faith Place: A 21st Century Experiment

In 2000, the St. Louis Metro Coalition Urban Taskforce of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, approximately a dozen lay and clergy leaders in the area, began meeting to plan a new ministry in the city. Up to that point in the Lutheran church's history in the city, ministry had either been done along traditional congregational lines or had followed the charity method – care and redemption work on behalf of the marginalized in a top-down model supported by Lutheran donors.

As the planning developed and it became obvious that I was going to be the leader of the ministry once it got started, I wanted to build this work with a more complete foundation. Using the positive meanings of the first use of the law as an additional piece of the theological framework, I wanted to build community-wide partnerships into the initial fabric of the ministry while still retaining our unique Christian-Lutheran core. I hoped that by leading by example, showing others what such ministry could look like, that we could begin to shift the way we worked together. Instead of keeping our marvelous heritage to

ourselves, I wanted to introduce a more inclusive model that incorporated both **care** and **redemption** work in a context that welcomed everyone: Lutheran, Christian or not. In retrospect, I see how naïve that hope was, however, in the process, I learned much about the Lutheran tradition, civic organizations and the vagaries of trying to make paradigm shifts.

To keep this hope at the center of all we did, I incorporated wholeness and inclusivity into Faith Place's mission statement: "Faith Place's mission is to enhance life in the community through opportunities to develop spiritual, physical, mental, social and emotional health. We are called to serve by: Caring for God's creation in all its manifestations and Speaking the Word of Redemption through Jesus Christ." Our logo was a circle of clasped hands, one to represent each color of human skin, as well as a rainbow-striped hand to represent the gay/lesbian population in our city with a cross in the middle of them all. Our intention was to partner with anyone who was about God's business in the community. It didn't matter what color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious interest or lack thereof, we were God's people in the community through both **care** and **redemption** work.

After numerous planning meetings and a year of research on possible sites, we were offered the use of a Missouri Synod school building in the Fox Park neighborhood in south St. Louis. Our next step was doing multi-cultural training with volunteers. Third, were our "walk-about" during which teams of two asked people on the street three simple questions: What do you like about this neighborhood, What would you like to see changed about this neighborhood, Is there room for another ministry in this neighborhood?

The consensus after a few weeks of conversations was that everyone wanted to get the kids off the streets, particularly

after school. There is no elementary school or community center in Fox Park and many children had nothing constructive to do once they got off the bus in the afternoon. So, in September 2003, we opened Faith Place with an after-school program that included snacks, games in the gym, arts and crafts, homework help, Bible lessons and prayer.

Within a month, a teacher from the Catholic archdiocesan schools came on board with a focus on music and discipline. Through his skills we were able to add choir and martial arts to the after school program. Most importantly, we added a Wednesday evening worship service at 5:30PM that incorporated lively African-American gospel music with our Lutheran liturgy. From the very beginning we did Word and Sacrament ministry with neighborhood children, some of whom went to Baptist or non-denominational churches on Sunday, some of whom had never before darkened the door of a church. Part of our Bible study time during the after school program was dedicated to on-going training in the Christian faith, liturgy and the sacraments.

One significant development early in Faith Place's life was the basketball program for young men in the neighborhood. These youth, some of whom were gang members, came together and played basketball in the gym while the younger children were involved with other activities in various classrooms. This program grew as neighborhood African- American men heard about it and came up to volunteer their time to work with these young men.

This was a risky development for Faith Place, in the sense that some of these young men had criminal records and participated in violent activities. Some of the younger kids were nervous when the older youth were in the building. Yet, how could we turn them away if we were about bettering the whole community? These young men were just as much a part of the community as anyone else, but often were not invited into community facilities

because of the fear that many folks, both black and white, have of their violent tendencies. Of course we took precautions and clearly stated our rules for conduct, but, for the most part, this program was a positive experience for us all.

On Wednesdays we also served dinner after worship. This was the place where we began to incorporate other Lutheran congregations into the ministry of Faith Place, so that they could begin to see what a **care** and **redemption** ministry in the city could look like today. Groups from congregations would bring food for dinner, worship with us and eat with us.

It was an eye-opening experience for many people who hadn't been to the city for years except to go to a baseball game. Gradually, we added congregational groups from other denominations as well. However, my initial thinking about this process was to help suburban Lutherans begin to re-connect with the city, get some positive experiences and then participate in theological conversation to help incorporate those experiences so that they could help broaden and deepen their understanding of what it meant to be Lutheran.

During the summers we were open from lunchtime (free lunches were provided through the St. Louis city summer food program for children) through the usual after-school program time for six weeks. Youth groups from other churches planned and put on a vacation Bible school-type program with the neighborhood children. Participating youth groups were each responsible for one week that included four afternoons of activities and the Wednesday evening meal. A few of the groups even stayed overnight in the building, just to get a better understanding of what it was like to live in an inner city neighborhood.

This was the program that most successfully incorporated my original thinking for Faith Place. In the summer of 2005 for one week, we had a youth group from Wisconsin staying on-site,

doing building repair in the morning and participating in the vacation Bible school in the afternoon. Additionally, there was a local youth group that came in the afternoon who organized and led the vacation Bible school program. We brought together out-of-state rural teenagers and adults, suburban St. Louis teenagers and adults with our regular staff and the neighborhood children and adults, to work, play, worship and eat together.

In the evenings after some fun activity (the MUNY, the Arch, etc.), I was able to sit down with the teenagers and adults from Wisconsin and do some theological reflection about the day. This was the time when I was able to help them sort out the experiences they were having and incorporate them into the faith structures that were already in place in their lives through their church experiences at home. We looked at our responsibilities as human beings to be about the **care** of creation with anyone who wanted to make a difference in the world. We also talked about speaking the word of redemption through Jesus Christ and the gift from God it was to worship with people we never imagined we'd ever meet. We also talked about the significance of using our gifts, as human beings and as Christians, in service to the world.

Faith Place connected with a wide variety of civic organizations while I was executive director. We participated in the Fox Park neighborhood association. We interacted with the DeSales Housing Corporation and the Neighborhood Stabilization programs of the city. Faith Place was involved with CardinalsCare and the Police Athletic Leagues. Our intention was to be open to anything that would build community in the Fox Park neighborhood, walking as partners with everyone who was doing **care** of creation work while we kept Jesus Christ as the center of our lives.

From the beginning, though Faith Place was grounded in the Lutheran tradition, we were an inter-denominational ministry.

Catholics, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Baptists, Presbyterians, folks from non-denominational churches, Pentecostals, all joined forces to help make Faith Place happen. The most interesting and eye-opening reaction to our work came from some folks who'd given up on church long ago. Even though they would no longer darken the door of a traditional church, they participated in, financially supported and embraced the work of Faith Place, largely because we were about building up the community for everyone. One young man even re-embraced Christianity after working at Faith Place. It was the combination of hands-on **care** of creation work and openness to the whole community as partners in this work wrapped around the Christian worship core of the ministry that pulled him back into the fold.

Of course, these were the highlights of my three years with Faith Place. As with all new ministries, Faith Place had problems, too. Funding for such a venture is always precarious. Genuine partnering between the white community and the African-American community in St. Louis is even more precarious. Most of all, we struggled with the traditional paradigm of how to do this kind of ministry.

In this regard, the Lutheran legacy of city ministry is both positive and negative. Though traditional models had done enormous good for the St. Louis community as a whole and for the Lutheran community in particular, those models for this work are no longer sufficient. Those ministries, as effective as they were at the time, must be re-tooled for the twenty-first century. I see reclaiming the positive meanings of the first use of the law as a first step toward building a new model for Lutheran care and redemption ministries in the years to come. It adds a dimension to basic Lutheran theological thinking about doing this work that comes straight out of our Reformation foundation. It gives Lutherans the freedom to work as partners with everyone who is doing **care** of the creation work, while

keeping core theological touchstones intact. Adding the positive meanings of the first use of the law challenges Lutherans to be about God's work in the world, both **care** and **redemption** work, without losing the faith in Christ that nourishes and sustains.

At Faith Place, though we encountered Muslims during our "walkabouts" in the summer of 2003 before we opened, we never were able to make that inter-faith connection. If Faith Place had survived, and continued to develop its programs that were open to everyone, I saw the possibility of such relationships developing. However, building trust among people is a long, slow process. Building trust between Christians is still an issue in our world, so building inter-faith trust can be even more difficult, especially in the tense religious climate today. Incorporating the positive meanings of the first use of the law gives Christians a basis for entering an inter-faith relationship as a partner rather than from a sense of superiority or as an enemy. At the same time, the Christian has his/her relationship of trust with Jesus Christ that is her/his anchor when the going gets rocky, as will happen.

Living Through Failure

If you were paying attention to the tenses of the verbs in the last paragraph, you will have caught the fact that Faith Place no longer exists. We kept it open for a little more than three years, but for a variety of reasons, Faith Place is no more. Funding was a problem, the chaos of the street culture kept day-to-day life in a state of continuous turmoil and taking one of the first steps into a paradigm shift is often like walking in the dark with no streetlights or moonlight.

Even though Faith Place only lived a short time, it was an excellent failure. We learned much that is helping St. Louis-area Lutherans take more steps with more information, both what

to do and what not to do, toward effective 21st century ministries. The Christ of faith and Jesus as example of right living are not a matter of either/or for Lutherans. Using more of our theological foundation to build new work upon gives us the freedom to try, fail, get up and try again. Incorporating the positive meanings of the first use of the law into our theological foundation allows us to function as both/and people – equal partners with all who care for creation and expounders of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Of course the end of this experience was painful. The collapse of a dream is always difficult. But the theological realities that shaped the dream are still solid and useable, even though the experiment itself was short lived. We learned and we moved on, wiser for the experience, more solidly committed to the theological foundation because of its resilience in the face of changing circumstances. It would have been easy to walk away and not try again, but God had other plans.

I was offered and accepted an opportunity to work with a congregation that was ready to try to make some big changes. We are walking forward, however hesitantly or inexpertly, into the preferred and promised future that God has planned for them. Although the details of the theological foundation that I've outlined above isn't part of our day-to-day conversations as we go about the business of being God's people in this place, the basic structure of the positive meaning of the first use of the law, the second use of the law and the Good News of Jesus Christ are providing the framework for evaluating how we will use our time, talents and treasure. Working with anyone interested in doing God's care of creation work in the community is becoming part of how we operate. We may not agree on many important even crucial spiritual issues, but if we can come together for the common good of our community, we make every effort to do it.

With that new reality in our lives, we are also cognizant of finding opportunities for “sharing the reason for the hope that is in us” if the occasion warrants such conversation. The reason we can do what we do is because of what Christ did for us. We realize that our Creator called us to participate in the care of creation AND to speak the word of redemption through Christ to our neighbor.

The work continues – both care and redemption ministries are needed as much today as they were at any time in the past. Thankfully, the Lord of the church has given us the resources and the grace to follow in His footsteps. Though we, no doubt, still have many questions and many fears, there is one decision we can make now. Are we going to sit paralyzed, unwilling to use what we’ve been given to discover new ways of doing ministry or are we going to trust our Lord to help us use the theological foundation He’s given us to walk into the future He has prepared for us? To use a metaphor from our immigrant past – are we going to get on the boat or not?

October 2008

References:

- 1 Lutheran Book of Worship, Augsburg Publishing House: Minneapolis, 1978, p.88.
- 2 Martin Luther, Table Talk, winter 1542-43 (LW 54, 442).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Martin Luther, Large Catechism, The Book of Concord [Kolb and Wengert, ed.], Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, 434.
- 5 Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., “Lutheran Social Action,” Thirty-seventh Annual Convention of Associated Lutheran Charities, 48.

6 Ibid., 50.

7 Ibid., 51.

8 Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., "The Lutheran Church Faces the World," Twenty-Fourth Convention of the Atlantic District of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 3.

9 Ibid., 22.

10 Ibid., 30.

11 Martin Marty, "The Church in the World" in **The Lively Function of the Gospel**, edited by Robert W. Bertram, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1966, 139.

12 Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., **The Church in the World**, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1949, 40.

13 Ibid., 41.

14 Ibid.

15 Caemmerer, **The Church in the World**, 44.

16 Caemmerer, "No Continuing City."

17 Matthew 22:36-40, New Revised Standard Version.

18 Caemmerer, "No Continuing City."

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Sally Morgenthaller, "Worship As Evangelism," May/June 2007 issue of Rev! Magazine (www.rev.org)

Lucre, Linus and Luke – Crossing the Current Financial Crises

What a fugly week this has been. And if you don't recognize that word, you can probably guess what it means and its origins. Or go to www.urbandictionary.com.

Ed just asked me in his own cryptic way if I would consider writing the Thursday Theology for this week.

My initial reaction was “you’ve got to be kidding me.” I recently resigned from the Crossings Board of Directors and withdrew my participation in the upcoming Conference (I was to lead a breakout session on pop culture and Crossings) because my work schedule for the next six to twelve months is hellish. (All this on the heels of the unexpected dying and death of my aunt – and that time off isn’t covered by bereavement policies.) I don’t readily quit any commitment, so this was not an easy decision for me. So how would I have time to write anything?

Why the purgatorial calendar? I work for a new company even though I sit at the same desk. Okay, mergers are hardly new but this one is different. By some accounts it’s the biggest merger in financial services history, and the current headquarters in the U.S. southeast is moving to St. Louis. Our legacy company

lost our name, our stock ticker symbol, our legal existence and for the most part, our systems and processes. The other legacy company (the new “we” don’t like to use “us” or “them” – we use “NewCo”) lost their home. Even though they retain their name, this time it is they who have to move to keep their jobs. Some of them feel like they were the ones who were acquired. (I refrain from using actual names of companies in this piece because I don’t want to possibly violate any non-disclosure agreements. Besides, based on this past week, company names don’t mean squat.)

The current crisis, which may have changed from the time of this writing (9/19) and its actual publication, is the latest in a series of mergers, acquisitions, bankruptcies, bailouts, finger-pointing and “oh crap” moments, all following the sub-prime mortgage disaster. You can’t swing a dead cat without hitting some reporter trying to find a new angle on this market crash. Which may be a good thing because I’m totally exhausted from the Hurricane Ike coverage, which itself displaced the entire presidential campaign coverage. It’s not that I don’t care about the victims of the storm (some right here in my small town of Brentwood – now officially a disaster area – a thousand miles from Galveston), or the presidential race. I care passionately about these stories but I’m sick of the hyper-media with their OCD-like (obsessive-compulsive disorder) focus on the latest crisis, until they drop it in favor of the next great crisis. It’s like “American Idol” or “Survivor” to the media – let’s vote on the next crisis to spotlight, or let’s kick your crisis off the island.

Everywhere I turn, the talk, walk, thoughts and collective psyche have been focused on where the future has gone. Water cooler conversation, normally reserved for diversions like television, movies or Formula 1 racing (it’s rather painful watching the Cards and Rams this year) are superceded by job

security, paying the bills, postponing retirement indefinitely. Even for those who have followed all the prudent advice based on lessons from the 1929 market crash and the Great Depression, the hard-earned and hard-invested monies – both interest and principal – are vanishing quickly.

It's even worse being at a financial services firm. Those markets are what created the jobs we currently have. The belief within the industry has always been that market volatility is good because volatility means investment opportunity (for somebody), which means large trading volumes, begetting large commissions, which drive the entire industry. After this week's jolts, nothing is certain anymore. Trading can and will continue, but like the man behind the Oz curtain, there's no longer a "Great Wizard" ... merely another commodity that's like everyone/everything else. People are anxious, tired and exhausted – and I'm on edge, a lot. Fighting the impulse to hit something or scream because the rules have changed – are there even any rules any more? I remember 1987's Black Monday (October 19 – my mother's birthday) and the catatonia then. Fresh out of grad school then, I couldn't appreciate the depth of others' woes – to see a lifetime of savings wiped out in a single day. I appreciate it much better now having just checked my 401(k) statements.

I've been in the financial services industry my entire professional career and there are two things I've learned: (1) I am an IT (information technology) professional and not a financial professional, and cannot, do not and will not dispense financial advice; and (2) predicting the stock market is not an exact science because at its heart, the market runs on emotion. When people feel good/bad about a company, its stock goes up/down accordingly. When people feel good/bad about the entire economy, all the global markets move up/down similarly. It's about confidence, built on stability.

And no matter what crisis may come, we used to console ourselves with “at least it’s not 1929 again”. I startled some colleagues this past Monday (9/15) when I pointed out that no matter where the Dow ended that day, it would be the most momentous day in stock market history. Three events (Lehman, Merrill, AIG) piled up over the weekend for the markets to emotionally respond to in one day of trading. But I pointed out even more – since the collective slide started by the sub-prime mortgage, the markets have been overvalued. Not in an academic, technical sense, but rather in the emotional sense of us overestimating our own health. It’s like we’re dying of multiple cancers and as the doctor tells about each one we keep thinking if we can lick the last one mentioned in the litany of diseases, we’ll be perfectly fine.

In short, the problem runs much deeper than we’ve been thinking. Combine that with our still unresolved actions/feelings about 9/11 and the cumulative costs of the war on terror, exposure of what happens when financial laws (designed to prevent a recurrence of the Great Depression) are relaxed or removed – we’ve got the makings a newer Greater Depression. (Sorry; got carried away by the hyper-media)

We could debate that last point for a few years, but what is clear is that we’re experiencing financial and emotional quakes in that formerly-bedrock foundation of financial confidence. Followed by the “hyper-media” after-shocks which simply accelerate the downward spiral of confidence and market drops, we have the makings of extreme fear, loss, doubt.

I had thought about grounding my slice of life with one of this week’s lessons, but Ed came at me with a different angle (partially to save time), and use Robert Bertram’s “A Christmas Crossing” based on Luke, originally published in “Currents in Theology and Mission.”

(See <https://crossings.org/archive/bob/ChristmasCrossing.pdf>) I don't normally like to re-use the same scripture in my own Crossings essays, mostly to force upon myself a diversity of scriptural texts. I had used Luke 2:1-20 in my best Crossings paper (way back when there were semester-long Crossings classes about two decades ago) to speak the Good News to a fictional 65 year-old Bruce Wayne in the ground-breaking graphic novel "The Dark Knight Returns", one of the main inspirations for the recent Christopher Nolan treatments of the Batman character in motion pictures "Batman Begins" and "The Dark Knight."

But the Lukan Christmas story is also one of my very favorite Gospel lessons. It's, as far as I know, the only scriptural text quoted by a commercial Christmas television special – by Linus in "A Charlie Brown Christmas." I watched that TV special countless times as a child and a young adult, awestruck by contrast of truth, serenity, calm and peace of those words amidst the din of Christmas over-commercialization. Not until much later after I was baptized as an adult (at age 23, exactly 23 years ago this month) did I realize how much Linus and Luke helped pave the way for my own spiritual journey (and how much I enjoy doing Crossings on pop culture).

So I re-read the Lukan Christmas account, through the lens of Bob's (he'll always be Bob to me) essay, and can't help but break my own rule and re-use it here, and provide an example of Crossings on pop culture, to boot.

Linus quotes scripture in response to Charlie Brown's exasperated plea for the true meaning of Christmas: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."

And in this story, I am one of the shepherds, to whom the Gospel speaks. Although a white collar worker, I'm toiling away in the

distant reaches of an office, far from being an angel (from the Greek meaning simply “messenger”), sometimes at night (if on call), far from a holy place (not to say that it’s unholy). But I tend the information systems that help my company keep the financial markets humming... until they don’t hum anymore. The whole world is upside-down. What was clear – market stability, prudent financial planning, investments for the future – have disappeared, into the night. Almost as if they were never there. The whole world is panicking from crisis to crisis, a fear not unlike the shepherds’ as they saw the frightful visitor (angel of the Lord) appear before them as brightly as the night was dark around them. Everything I trusted with respect to personal finance and being fiscally responsible – poof! Gone, destroyed, no longer reliable. My own behaviors – reflecting stability and confidence – shot to hell as I revert to bad habits, becoming more irritable and short-tempered, searching for a calm port in these financial storms. I worry about every asset – money and time – and how can I provide for my family? How can we bequeath my children’s generation such a huge debt? Rather than providing for them, collectively the burden of the government bailouts will be inflicted on them. How can I look them in the eye, years (not so many) from now when they see the world we left for them?

And yet, these fears, great as they may be, are not very similar to the shepherds’ “phobos” – petrifying fear. As great as my fears are, they only touch upon my accountability to others, and perhaps to myself. From the Luke-via-Linus quote (I still hear that kid actor’s voice in my head): “and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.” As an eight year-old I had never heard such wording. “Sore afraid.” No one talks like that. That’s even scarier than the Wolfman or the Mummy – and now I’m dating myself because these days it would be Freddy Krueger, Cloverfield, or... okay, the Mummy again.

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring

you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” Okay, definitely not the movie monsters; is it monsters of any kind? What kind of scary also talks about “great joy?” That’s a whole different kind of fear, a different kind of accountability.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” You know, we say these words so often they can easily lose their edge in the repetition. “Saviour” hasn’t lost its edge. It sounds good because simply it is. Save money. Save time. Or currently from the TV show “Heroes” – “Save the cheerleader, save the world.” Save souls. This notion is intuitive.

“Christ” – instinctively we know this word is good. It’s the second half of “Jesus Christ”, which we all know is the answer to every question asked at Sunday School. But “Christ” is the honorific that replaces the traditional moniker “of Nazareth.” It signifies the anointed, the one who the prophets said would come one very special day. God promised this future event and God’s chosen people awaited with great anticipation.

“Lord” – meaning owner. Of what? As God incarnate, this little baby is THE owner of, well, everything, including the birds and bees, fields and streams, flora and fauna, and as we are so quick to forget, us humans who have been blessed with gift of fashioning and creating. Creators of art, language, science, technology, finance – very much in the image of Our Own Creator.

The angst I feel is not just fiscal responsibility for my family and community, and to give to the needy. It’s that I too often trust only in myself to make prudent choices about my money and time. It’s not only my time and money; it’s God’s. It belongs to that swaddling babe in the manger. It’s a joint loss or joint profit. I bristle at the stereotypical televangelists because

wealth or poverty seems capricious at best, reward for sinlessness and punishment for sinfulness at worst – a form of theological behavioral modification. In truth, it is my heart that is at stake. When I trust in (or as Martin Luther put it – hang my heart on) myself and my judgment to the exclusion of God, I no longer trust in God. It's no longer just my problem. God has lost me – my heart and soul.

And that's why Christmas is so beautiful. It's not just the light trumping the geophysical longest night of the year (in the northern hemisphere anyway), but also the thwarting all-encompassing darkness in which I lose myself – the financial losses are comparatively insignificant. God's response to God's losing me is to become one of us.

Big deal, some might say – especially skeptical folks who lean towards agnostic or athiest. Other religions talk of gods disguising themselves as humans mostly for their own amusement. And those stories can be wildly entertaining – think “Jason and the Argonauts”. The only problem is that I've got nothing riding on those stories. Those gods could care less about Charlie Brown or Linus or Sherman. We would be but pawns in their chess game. The manger baby? This God has got some (actually all) skin in this game.

“And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” A quick note about signs – I crack up every time I see “Monty Python's Life of Brian” because everyone was looking for signs, irrespective of true significance. (Cue the scene in which Brian runs away and drops a gourd and loses a sandal – should we all get gourds, or create a pile of sandals or walk around with only one sandal? Still hilariously painful after all these years.) But there's deep significance in these signs. All newborns love to be swaddled, but these clothes portend burial garments, and the

manger (instead of a crib) foreshadows a displaced tomb. This story of God becoming one of us is very different from the mischievous pantheon of gods; this is but the beginning of The Story of God giving all for us: dying an undeserved death, then rising again, thus defeating death.

It's The Story of paying off debts with the ultimate sacrifice, and balancing the ledgers of hearts, minds, souls and bodies. It's The Story that becomes intertwined with our own stories in our here and now. No longer are there crises of spiritual bankruptcies – the price has been paid. Hence the “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

That's where Linus stops quoting Luke. There's a pregnant pause there, a time for reflection, for meditation, even a short prayer. I'm pretty sure there's no way this TV special could be made today unless it were on a dedicated religious network. But back in the 1960s there were the three big networks and any show caught a large percentage of eyeballs. It's amazing – a miracle – that a television show could share the Good News so prominently. And even though it's a Christmas special – the fact that no other Christmas specials have done so speaks volumes.

There's more to the Lukan Christmas account beyond Linus-as-messenger (angel?) and it's just as important. It's what the shepherds do after hearing the message.

“And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the

saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.”

After hearing the angel’s announcement, the shepherds are invited to see the signs and believe, just as we are invited to believe, to have trust in God’s generous payment of our debts. As much as God’s gift of settling our accounts is offered to all, it becomes effective if we but trust in it – hang our hearts on it, as it were. Trusting in God-in-Jesus, rather than hanging our hearts on accounts and finances. Ironically, following the imprint on our currency of “In God We Trust.”

But after seeing and believing, what do the shepherds do? They return to their workplaces and daily lives – to their regular programming as it were – but changed. They glorify and praise God, doing their shepherdly duties but adding another task to their to-do list: to be messengers, that is, angels, of God’s Good News. As I can also do the same: return to the desk that serves two different companies, do my daily work and continue the struggle of making responsible fiscal decisions and commiserate with colleagues, but without the dark night of analysis paralysis and what-if’ing myself to death. What had been dialogue of despair has been replaced by hope and confidence of God paying my God-debts for me. With any luck at all, some might notice the shift in my attitudes and behavior and ask about it. With that opening I might be able to open new dimensions in my work relationships. (By the way, I’ve never been a soapbox evangelist – leavening existing relationships is how God has blessed me with evangelistic opportunities.)

I started writing this as a response to an “Edwardian (a

Schroederian?) Call,” with the initial reaction of “how the heck do I find the time to write about it?” After squeezing time (as precious a commodity as money) out of a hectic schedule and Crossing my own life here during these tumultuous times, the better question is “can I afford not to have the Gospel speak to my life?” In a very special way made possible by this Internet missive, I too am returning to my daily workspace (my home computer), glorifying and praising God for all the things I have heard, as it was told unto me. Thanks for reading, and I hope you too share in the glorifying and praising in these dark times.

Sherman Lee
19-22 Sept 2008
Brentwood, MO

41 Days and 40 nights in Europe – Part II

Colleagues,

After last week’s interlude to remember the events of September 11, 2001, it’s back to “How I spent my summer” (well, half of it). In the first paragraph of Part I (The missiology conference in Hungary)—a fortnight ago—I promised not to give a travelogue, but focus on three items for three ThTh postings. The missiology conference in Hungary was the first. The next two were described thus: “the July conference honoring the 200th birthday of Wilhelm Loehe, major figure in USA Lutheranism in the 1800s; and then some observations on the sermons in the six Sunday

liturgies where we worshipped, one of them even by yours truly in Budapest." I'll take the second of these two for this week's offering: Six sermons and six Sunday services.

1. First one was in Lorsbach, a village near Frankfurt am Main, where the huge international airport is. Pastor/proclaimer that morning was Rahel Hahn, rostered ELCA clergywoman (!) married to a US Army officer stationed at a US military base there. Rahel was our neighboring pastor (Litchfield, Illinois) a few years ago across the Mississippi while her husband was stationed at Scott Air Force Base. Born and educated in Germany, Rahel came to the USA to get a Ph.D. and then stayed. So in the town where the family now lives she is the "natural" choice as guest presider/proclaimer when the local Padre (in this case, Madre) is on vacation. That happened on July 20. No surprise, Rahel preached the Gospel.
2. Ditto for next Sunday, July 27, though the venue was. It was the soccer field at Lehrberg (near the Loehe conference site of Neuendettelsau, near Nürnberg). Why there?! It was the 100th anniversary of the Lehrberg Associated Sports Club. And here is where the old territorial-church tradition—once upon a time "state-church"—comes into play in Germany. If the town is celebrating something on Sunday, then a church service must be part of the celebration. And if some Lehrbergers are Roman Catholic and some Lutheran, then it will be an ecumenical worship event. Punkt! And so it was. Local folks with sport artifacts in hand – soccer ball, tennis racket, hula-hoop(!), unicycle(!)—participated in the liturgy. Lutheran Pastor Rudolf Keller was the preacher. He too preached the Gospel—crossing both the diagnosis and prognosis of his scripture text with the "Sport-geist" of his town neighbors—all gathered under a big tent. Since it

was Germany—and Bavaria to boot—there was, of course, a “Beer-tent” right alongside the main tent to provide potables needed for the picnic meal following the service.

3. Next Sunday was August 3. We were in Lübeck in North Germany at the Lutheran cathedral in this ancient city, once “Queen of the Hanseatic League.” The history of Lübeck includes Dietrich Buxtehude as long term musician, Bach coming to Lübeck as a youngster to study under Buxtehude, the hometown of Thomas Mann, and many more salient segments of German history. E.g., the place where marzipan candy was first confectioned. The Sunday liturgy—Holy Communion included—was classic and edifying. Ditto for the music. We attended with the retired bishop, my classmate at the theological faculty of Hamburg University 50 yrs ago. The sermon was brilliant—but there was no Gospel in it. So taken was I that even though I never learned the pastor’s name, I wrote him a letter once I got home. Copy pasted below.
4. August 10 it was Berlin, at the American Church in Berlin, “An Ecumenical, International Christian Community.” It’s ELCA-connected: rostered ELCA pastor, ELCA worship book, ELCA seminarian as intern, who on this Sunday was saying farewell to go back to the seminary and so was the preacher for the liturgy. Here too the proclamation was Gospel-less. With all the farewell hoopla following the liturgy, Marie and I couldn’t even get close to the much-beloved intern for conversation of any sort. So, go to Plan B. Since the ELCA is “my” church, when we got home I wrote to the president of the intern’s seminary indicating that this student still “needed help” before being turned loose on our denomination. Copy pasted below.
5. August 17, Budapest, I was guest homilist at a Lutheran congregation on the “Pest” side of the Danube in this Buda and Pest combination capital of Hungary. I know what I

said in English, but I haven't a clue as to what my native Hungarian interpreter said. Later at lunch he teased me about that very fact: "You'll never know what I said you said." Since he's a graduate of an American university, I know he could do it right. But did he? 'Nuff said.

6. August 24, Budapest again, week-long missiological conference just completed, day before our flight back home, a colleague from the conference, American Evangelical working in Budapest, takes us to his church, The Danube International Church. It is THE church for English-speaking Protestants living in Budapest—US embassy (and military, as we learned) personnel, international business folks, educators. A large number of Asians and Africans. When we see the band up front on the podium, no altar, no pulpit, projection screens—we can guess what we're in for. Yup. "Please stand up." Then thirty minutes of praise music. Then came the sermon, pastor taking the mike and standing before us. "The first of a series of three, maybe four or five, that I want to preach on the coming Sundays on the text of Exodus 33:12-23, Moses wrestling with God in prayer." We were given half a dozen particulars about what serious praying is, taking Moses as our model. [How many more points are to come in the subsequent Sundays, we could only guess.] The sermon lasted for one hour. Then came a general prayer and we were dismissed.

No surprise, no gospel in the sermon. Jesus mentioned only at the end as the one and only way of salvation. Not much Gospel either in all the "praise songs" at the beginning.

That was it. Five Lutheran preachers, one Baptist (as we later learned). Gospel proclaimed—three for six (if yours truly actually did do that on August 17 AND it did carry over into the Hungarian language). That's 50%. So, not to complain. Even if

the cup is only half full, that's good news. Something to celebrate, as St. Paul does in the sticky-wicket of Philippi: "What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed . . . and in that I rejoice." (Phil.1:18).

Peace and joy!
Ed Schroeder

Here are the responses (mentioned above) generated by two of the no-Gospel homilies.

To the pastor who preached at the "Dom zu Lübeck " [Lübeck cathedral] on August 3, 2008

I don't know your name, so I address you as Dear Brother.

I am a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, now retired, 77 yrs old. My wife and I were present for the Gottesdienst [divine service] at the Dom on August 3. We were with the Kohlwages. Karl-Ludwig and I were Kommilitonen [classmates] as theology students in Hamburg in the 1950s. We have continued to stay in contact with each other ever since.

At lunch after the liturgy we discussed the worship service—and, of course, your sermon.

Here are some items that I added to the discussion.

1. Christ was never mentioned in the sermon until the very end—and then only in a reference to the Gospel Lection for the day, Jesus telling the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector. In the language of Apology IV of the Lutheran Confessions, there was no "Christum necessare" presented to the congregation—Christ being necessary for the sermon to achieve its goal of getting the congregation

to trust God's forgiveness.

2. In sharp contrast to that was the hymn immediately following the sermon, #345, where "Christum necessare" [Christ is necessary] was fundamental to every one of the final four verses.
3. Karl mentioned that Christ is not presented as "necessary" in either the Gospel text for the day, nor in your sermon text about David and Nathan ["Thou art the man!"]. True, I said, but that then raises the question: How to preach a "Christum necessare" sermon when "Christum Necessare" is not in the Biblical text? Here too Melanchthon in Apol. IV speaks directly to that topic. In several places he says: If "Christ's promise" is absent in a Biblical sermon text, "it must be added" to that text in order to preach a Christian sermon from that text.
4. In America too, we often hear that one should "preach the Biblical text," but for Lutherans, that is not the case. The mandate is to "preach the Gospel," not "preach the text," and use the text as instrument for doing so. Final test for any pastor's sermon is: Did I preach the Gospel? If Christ is never mentioned in my sermon, then he surely isn't necessary in my sermon. If Christ is not necessary, then I did not preach the CHRISTIAN Gospel, but, as Paul says to the Galatians, "an other gospel."
5. Of course, I am not saying "Just mention Christ and the sermon is OK." That is nonsense. To draw another insight appearing many times in Apology IV. Christ must be "used" for the very purposes that he himself commands us to "use" him, to bring his promise to sinners and to strengthen the faith of those who already do trust Christ. You may remember that one of the major critiques Melanchthon makes of scholastic preachers of his day is that they "waste" Christ and never "use" him at all to bring Good News to the people.

6. Preaching Christian sermons on Old Testament texts is difficult. It is relatively easy to preach a “Jewish” sermon on OT texts. I am very aware of this because I live in St. Louis, Missouri, a city with many Jewish synagogues and temples. I am active in ecumenical discussions in our city. I know Jewish Rabbis (good friends) who preach about the David and Nathan text, commending their congregation to trust God’s mercy and forgiveness. And, of course, Christ is not necessary in their sermons, and is never mentioned. When we were walking through “downtown” Lübeck, Karl showed us the local synagogue. I wonder what would come from the discussion if you and that Rabbi talked about the David/Nathan text.
7. For many years I have been working with a group in the USA (mostly Lutherans, but not all) who are giving attention to these themes in Christian preaching—especially the topic of “necessitating Christ.” It is the Crossings Community. The work of the Crossings Community is available on the World Wide Web. Our web-address is <www.crossings.com>. We have been doing text studies during these years and offering them (at no cost) to anyone who is interested. We follow the “Revised Standard Lectionary,” a three-year cycle now widely in use across the ecumenical spectrum of Christian denominations in the USA—from Roman Catholic to Baptist. For each Sunday in the lectionary year there are three readings: Old Testament, Epistle, Gospel. During the first years our Crossings text studies were done on the Epistle and Gospel readings. Beginning with Advent 2007 we are now presenting studies on OT lectionary texts. If you want to see the “necessitating Christ” motif at work in OT text studies, I recommend that you go to our web site and see for yourself.
8. From my many years as a Lutheran pastor I know it is

“difficult” for one of us to comment on the preaching of an “Amtsbruder,” [pastoral colleague]. Nevertheless I do so in the confidence that you too are convinced of “necessitating Christ” in pastoral work and Christian life. Therefore I tell you what I think I heard (and didn’t hear) in the Sunday liturgy at the Lübecker Dom on Aug. 3, 2008.

9. My wife and I were overjoyed that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper was part of the Sunday liturgy.

Pax et Gaudium!

Edward H. Schroeder

To the president of ELCA Seminary xxx

“Your student needs help”

Seminary president zzzzz

MAIN REASON FOR THIS MISSIVE is your returning senior student (named so-and-so), intern this past year at The American Church in Berlin. Marie and I were there for the liturgy August 10. It was the intern’s farewell Sunday and last time in the pulpit. The intern didn’t preach the Gospel and didn’t know he/she wasn’t doing it.

With all the farewell hoopla attending after the liturgy, we didn’t get to talk face-to-face. So this SYS—save your student before he/she goes Gospel-less into pastoral leadership—goes to you as presiding officer of her/his seminary. This student needs help. You’ve got one more year. Do something.

Pax et Gaudium!

Ed

[Said seminary president responded: “Thanks. I will indeed do

something.”]

It's September 11 Again. It's been 7 years.

Colleagues,

It's September 11 again. It's been 7 years. And nothing has really changed. Especially in my nation. The basics of the Bible's political theology continue to be accurate. The nations continue to rage and the people plot in vain. The Babel story continues to be the blueprint: “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” [You know what that “tower with its top in heaven” signals. “God, move over.”] Back down on the ground, Goliath continues to be the patron saint.

And the consequences are always the same. God does indeed “scatter” the Babel-bulders, often by their own hand. According to Psalm 2, the One who by divine right “sits in the heavens,” that deity “laughs; the LORD has them in derision. Then he speaks to them in his wrath, and terrifies them in his fury.” That also happened to the Chosen Nation, since they too opted for the Babel-blueprint, and to Babylon they indeed did go—in chains. All Goliaths get decapitated. And the people are clueless about what is happening. Why should we expect the descendents of Adam and Eve in our day to be any smarter than their primal parents?

Granted, those are texts from the Hebrew scriptures, but in the

NT that “old” Biblical political theology doesn’t change. There is no place where Jesus advises Herod or Caesar (or even Pilate in that epic tete-a-tete) how to turn nations away from such madness, such blindness. His program is focused elsewhere. “Repent and trust the Good News” is the compact mantra in Mark’s Gospel (1:15). You’ve got to change the hearts of the inhabitants—and that happens only one heart at a time in both OT and NT—before you can get them to change replicating in their national life the Goliath-mindset in their hearts. The program, as the NT epistles say, is to move folks from Goliath-mindsets to the mind of Christ. Where that mindset change doesn’t happen, no change happens in the body politic either. Christians should not expect even mini-paradises. Freddie Mac and Fannie May are the Babel-Goliath reincarnations of this past week in the USA. What will next week’s will be?

Even with the Goliath-mindset work in us humans, it’s not just our doings either. God’s hand is in the mix, God the critic, God the judge on the bench in the cosmic courtroom. “God gives nations the leaders they deserve.” That’s what Luther claimed. For all the gritching now rampant in our nation about the “Bush-years,” has anyone—even any preacher—told us Americans this? Listen up. God bestowed on you the “Bush-years.” No, it wasn’t an event of “God bless America,” but just the opposite. And except you change, change big time—aka repentance—it won’t change.

“Change” is now the major mantra of both candidates for president in the USA. But the change they talk about is rearranging the deck-chairs on the Titanic. Then as now, it won’t make any difference. God the Iceberg [literally, ice-mountain] looms up ahead. Deck-chair change will not “move mountains,” and definitely not this one.

In the presidential primaries here in Missouri, Marie voted for

Hillary and I voted for Barack (whose name means “blessing”). So that was a wash. But when Obama subsequently denounced his one-time pastor Jeremiah Wright for his straight-talk, his straight-from-the-Bible political theology, now applied to America, I lost heart. Not simply because Wright’s political theology is mine too, but because it’s God’s political theology. “Nation under God,” yes, but under God’s what? Under God’s scrutiny, evaluation, verdict: “Weighed, and found wanting.” That’s what. Though both candidates now shout for change, neither seems to have a clue about THE change that this calls for. Whether it’s Obama or McCain (or after that “just one heartbeat away”—Biden or Palin), we’ll be getting the leaders we deserve. That is not good news. But it is not unfair.

You’ve heard in these postings before references to Luther’s treatise on War Against the Turks (Muslims) in 1529. That little essay was my point of departure for the ThTh posting 7 yrs ago—48 hours after the WTC towers crumbled. I’ve just looked at it again. What’s said there is still true. The crumbling inferno of our own Twin Towers of Babel—2557 days ago—has brought no change. [If interested in the ancient essay, you can find it at <https://crossings.org/thursday/2001/thur0913.shtml>]

“Change” (both as verb and noun) is the best nickel-word translation for repent/repentance in Biblical parlance. Could a president or a candidate for that office ever come out and simply say that to this nation? Lincoln did, right in the middle of the Civil War as God the critic turned us loose to kill each other—no al-Qaeda or Taliban needed. Could that happen again? God forbid. It’s unthinkable. It was unthinkable in 1861 too. But it happened. These stern words from Jesus don’t go away: “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Here’s what Lincoln (the first ever Republican president of the USA) said: “We have been preserved, these many years, in peace

and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”

Hanging on to Lincoln’s last word, I can say, and so can you,

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

IAMS XII

Colleagues:

After 41 day and 40 nights (sounds almost Biblical) we’re back home—and grateful to Robin Morgan (as of yesterday a grandmother) for keeping ThTh flowing for these past weeks. My plan is not a show-and-tell of all that happened during those days – though there are a lot of wild stories – but to focus on three pieces of our time away. For this week’s posting the International Association for Mission Studies conference (IAMS XII) in Balatonfüred, Hungary; next week, d.v., the July conference honoring the 200th birthday of Wilhelm Loehe, major

figure in USA Lutheranism in the 1800s; and the week thereafter some observations on church life in Germany and Hungary, e.g., the sermons in the six Sunday liturgies where we worshipped, one of them even by yours truly in Budapest.

The theme of the IAMS conference (August 16-23) was "Human Identity and the Gospel of Reconciliation: Agenda for Mission Studies and Praxis in the 21st Century." Over 250 participants showed up, representing 48 countries, a veritable multitude of "nations, tribes and peoples and languages." Yes, and in our conference worship we came close to Rev. 7:10: with all this mixture "crying out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!'" Worship leaders included the Lutheran bishop of Hungary, the rector of the Reformed University in Budapest, Russian Orthodox priests, Pentecostals from Bulgaria, African Evangelicals, Dutch Protestants, and the bishop of the Roman Catholic Church of Serbia. A tad of what in seminary days was called "realized eschatology."

For four days of the week a keynote speaker got us started: Roman Catholic Miklos Tomka (Hungary), Religious Identity and the Gospel of Reconciliation; Presbyterian Lalsangkima Pachuau (Mizoram, India), Ethnic Identity and the Gospel of Reconciliation; ELCA Lutheran Wi Jo Kang (Korea/USA), National Identity and the Gospel of Reconciliation. The fourth one focused on the upcoming Edinburgh conference 2010 commemorating the 100th anniversary of Edinburgh 1910, the world missionary conference that triggered the mission-ecumenism of the 20th century: Baptist Brian Stanley (England), Mission and Human Identity in the Light of Edinburgh 2010.

For one whole day the participants moved away from the conference site to get close to various aspects of religious life in Hungary. Of the eight options. Marie went back to

Budapest to learn about Judaism past and present. I headed south to meet Roman Catholics and the gypsies in their congregations in several parishes.

At six points in the conference program small interest groups gathered to share their mission studies research in eight different areas. Eighty-five IAMS members presented papers. That's where my contribution, "Luther as Mission Theologian," had its audience.

Now ten days later, here is a Balaton retrospective. I'll begin with Bill Burrows' comment in the evaluation session way at the end. Bill said something like this: "For three IAMS gatherings now – South Africa [2000], Malaysia [2004], and now Hungary [2008] – we've had a major theological concept as one of the two key terms linked in our conference theme. But we've not given the theological term any serious attention in our discussions. The second term dominates our conversation. This year it was identity. Reconciliation was not given any comparable serious attention –Biblical, church-historical, yes, missiological."

In telling you about the IAMS gatherings in [2004](#) and [2000](#) in days gone by I registered a similar complaint. Themes for those two events were "Integrity of Mission in the Light of the Gospel" and "Reflecting Jesus Christ Crucified and Living in a Broken World." At those gatherings the explicit theological piece of the theme – Jesus Christ Crucified and Living, The Light of the Gospel – did not get assigned as topic for a keynote speech. Then—and now with reconciliation too—it was generally taken for granted that "we all know what that means," so now let's give attention to the broken world and mission integrity.

But is there consensus on the theological anchor-terms in those conference themes? Not really. What all of us IAMS members DO

know is that at these cardinal points of Christian theology the differences in our marvelous ecumene would surface, so tactically it may seem wise to eschew going there. But if for this time we'd simply had someone give us a keynote presentation on the explicit Greek terms for reconciliation in the New Testament [katallassoo and katalagee], the differences in our respective theological traditions would surely have surfaced, but we'd be discussing NT texts and NT theology and not each other's theological tradition – with all the “collateral” prejudgments (and collateral damage) that can accompany that.

Specifically important for this year's program would have been that the NT use of that reconciliation term (unique in St. Paul) does NOT mean “enemies becoming friends,” which is the common meaning of the term in today's English. And it was that meaning intended every time I heard the term used at our assembly. With one explicit exception. Keynoter Brian Stanley took us to the Greek term in 2 Cor. 5 and showed in that fundamental reconciliation text that “katallagee” means “exchange.” It's a commercial term from the Hellenistic marketplace, not a term for restoring fractured human relations.

But we didn't hear Brian, or if we did, we soon forgot it, and “friendship restored” took over again as the reality of reconciliation. How might our week-long conversations have been different, yes, even improved, if that had been the meaning we'd all used for reconciliation? Not that “restored friendship” is unimportant, but if katallagee means something else when it shows up in the NT, why not mine that treasure? What consequences are there when “God the Exchanger” is put at the center of Missio Dei? What consequences for our “identity” discussion when God's own Son changes identities as Paul brashly claims in 2 Cor 5? “Christ assumes the identity of sinner, so that sinners might take on the identity of righteous.” “A great exchange indeed”—as one old Christmas carol puts it.

Such a NT study on those key terms, focused on 2 Cor. 5—yes, reading the text in terms of identities new and old— was exactly what Christoffer Grundmann offered in the discussion group he chaired at Balaton. If his had been the first keynote presentation, it was not only conversation that would have been different. His paper did not move from the Gospel of Reconciliation TO issues of Human Identity. He tracked out how the Gospel of Reconciliation IS all about human identity: Who we ARE—better, who we BECOME, when “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.”

When Paul elsewhere speaks of the “scandal” of the Gospel, it is precisely this scandalous exchange he’s speaking of. God MAKES His Beloved Son TO BE sin for us (though on his own he KNEW NO SIN), so that we might BECOME the (very) RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD in Him.” Granted, “restored friendship” is one element of the result, but God is being wildly friendly to sinners in the reconciliation action without any prior signals that the intended receivers are going to be friendly to God in return. In fact, it is precisely “while we were yet sinners” that God unilaterally initiates this incredible exchange—righteousness exchanged for sin. Luther rendered the NT term with his “froehlicher Wechsel,” a joyous exchange—translated by Bob Bertram as “a sweet swap.”

OK, some may say—especially if they haven’t yet heard Grundmann’s essay—“Reconciliation is indeed a big deal, possibly bigger than we remembered at Balaton, but how does that help us at the “Human Identity” pole of our bi-polar theme? How does that help us with the manifold identity conflicts in our own day?

Just this. The Human Identity topic is central to the first term in our theme. It is not that “reconciliation” is the theological element and “identity” is the sociological/anthropological

element, and at IAMS XII we want to bring them together. Not so. "Identity" is a primal theological term. God engineering the exchange twixt Jesus and us is an identity change—big time. Sinner and Righteous are identity terms! We agreed at Balaton that identity is a "relational reality." So here too it is in the sinner's God-relationship, Paul claims, that God in Christ is first off exchanging identities—Christ gets the sinner's identity, sinners get Christ's righteous identity. A great exchange idneed!

So the conference theme might have unfolded like this:

1. The Gospel of Reconciliation is an identity change at the primal relationship human beings have with God.
2. Before any encounter with that Gospel all of us humans have multiple identities as God's creatures, manifold relationships in the human webs and networks into which we were born and grew up. Most of them without our ever having chosen them.
3. And they persist even after we have encountered the joyful exchange of the Gospel of Reconciliation.
4. How does the primal identity change in our God-relationship intersect with all those other identities we have?
5. The Biblical text that accompanied the promotional material for IAMS XII (Galatians 3:26-29) was explicit and graphic. For those enjoying the new identity of "children of God through faith," the prior identities are wiped out! Gone! "There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring—heirs according to the promise."
6. In the plenary sessions it got no attention. What might have happened if it had? What if that feisty thesis from St. Paul had been in focus in our conversations? New human

identity flowing from the Gospel of reconciliation—Abraham's offspring, heirs of the promise—wipes out all prior identities—including the primordial ones of race, ethnicity, social class, gender. They are 'no longer.' Isn't that what Paul says in Gal. 3? How can that be true?

7. I don't remember that text ever surfacing in the discussions where I was present. That was surprising, I think, since the executive and conference committee commended that text to us from the very outset. How did it get lost at Balaton?
8. Though I never heard Gal. 3:26-29 cited in the plenary sessions during the week, there were hints of it now and then. One I recall, like Bill Burrows' comment, came right near the end in Norberto Saracco's response to Wi Jo Kang. Wi Jo didn't clarify in his presentation just how God's reconciliation in Christ connected with Korean reunification. Norberto thought that was needed and I think he offered a solution—but oh so subtly. It is "partly right . . . that the Good News of the Gospel . . . undermines national identity...true that national identity is linked with religion." That sounds close to Paul, at least "partly" close.
9. Wi Jo responded citing his own Lutheran language for God's ambidextrous work in the world—with God's "left hand" working to preserve the world (e.g., a unified Korean people) and God's "right hand" work in Christ to "reconcile that world unto himself." Same God, two distinctly different projects. So, yes, even if Korean reunification never comes [God forbid!], God's reconciling offer to all Koreans is not diminished.
10. I happen to know that one of Wi Jo's teachers (mine too) articulated God's ambidextrous activity with the acronym DEXTRA, Latin word for right hand. He's done this complete

with visual presentations of his own two human hands:

D: *The works of God's two hands are DIFFERENT (holding the hands up and apart, one with thumb on this side, the other with thumb on the other side).* **E:** *The works of God's two hands are EQUIVALENT (five fingers here, five there).*

X: *X is for the CROSS. In the Cross of Christ, God's right hand intersects the left (hands together, thumbs up, with right hand fingers "crossing" into those of the left).*

T: *God's right hand work in Christ first of all TRUSSES the left, supports and sustains it (visually demonstrated)*

R: *. . . but begins to REPLACE the left (right hand—still interwoven with the left—starts to overturn the left. E.g., the "old commandment" of "love your neighbor as yourself" gives way to Christ's "new commandment . . . as I have loved you").*

A: *. . . and eventually ANTIQUATES it (left hand—like the "heaven and earth" of the old creation "passes away").*

Wi Jo didn't say all that by any means, but he could have.

Another hint of Galatians three came in the discussion following Miklos Tomka's address. He concluded his paper by telling us that the widespread attraction of "religion" in former East Block countries needed deeper probing. Needed at the base was "the healing of wounded identities" as "the first step to reconciliation." When asked in the discussion for his own words for what is being sought, he said: "God. . . redemption . . . a genuine hope for the future." After session concluded I mentioned "promise" (from Gal. 3) to him as a unifying term for

all three. "Next time I'll mention four words," he said.

A third hint of Galatians three came in Kima Pachauau's presentation, but he didn't go far enough. Kima convinced us that relationships are fundamental to identity. Yet he never got around to the new God-relationship explicit in being "Abraham's offspring, heirs of the promise." Expressed in the language of 2 Cor. 5, this is the new identity that comes from being a reconciled sinner instead of "just" a sinner in whose identity God still "counts trespasses."

Kima highlighted Imago Dei as the Gospel's word for human identity, but didn't move on to Imago Christi as the "even-better-than-that" new identity that flows from God's reconciling work. And he hyped the neighbor-love "as yourself", but eschewed the New Commandment and its even better "as I have loved you" new criterion.

I have a hunch that Kima's and my respective heritages—Calvinist and Lutheran—are surfacing here. And that brings us full circle to the topic at the outset. If at IAMS XII we'd specifically focused on Biblical reconciliation texts, our denominational heritages would surely have been in the mix. But instead of arguing Luther or Calvin—or Thomas or Wesley or whichever theological tradition, we'd have been working from scriptures—wrestling with Paul and John and Matthew—to get our theological bearings. And as Milos told us with his final 5 words, "And this is not a little."

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. We've been home long enough to learn that registrations continue to come in for the Crossings Conference Oct. 20-22. But there still is room. So why not y'all (or some of y'all) come and join us? Registration information is at <www.crossings.org>

or you can call the office at 314-576-7357.

F.W. Herzberger Part Four – Herzberger's Theological Legacy Robin J. Morgan

The one man who wrote for the Associated Lutheran Charities and most clearly carried Herzberger's theological legacy beyond Herzberger's lifetime was Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr. Caemmerer was pastor of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in St. Louis when he wrote "Lutheran Social Action" for the ALC in 1938. This article was the first of many that he wrote about the church's relationship with the world even after he became a professor in the Department of Practical Theology of Concordia Seminary. Caemmerer "provided the most penetrating and sustained formal theological contributions to the Charities conference both before and after World War II."[1] *In this first article, he talks about the different circumstances in which present day Lutherans found themselves compared to the time of the Reformation:*

The Reformation arose in a day when the Church was the dominant institution of the world not only religiously, but also politically and economically. From a fourth to a half of the real estate holdings of Europe were in the hands of the Church. Its endowments controlled many educational, commercial, charitable enterprises. Only in exceptional instances, chiefly in the law faculties, were instructors in the higher and middle schools of Europe other than ordained

clergymen.[2]

Caemmerer discusses the fact that Missouri Synod Lutheranism was still focused on its own development and “for the most part [had] a narrowly horizoned social consciousness, with little participation in the affairs of a democratic commonwealth.”[3] He highlighted three points that Lutherans did well in supporting the social good:

1. Fine standard of decency
2. Substantial home life
3. Courtesy and kindness, at least inside the group

However, “pitiable progress is to be registered in the last twenty-five years in organized charity even toward our own needs. There has been a standstill of Lutheran participation in community and national affairs.”[4]

To begin remedying this state, Caemmerer suggests two avenues for education: first, the clergy and second, the laity. They must be taught that the purpose of the congregation (the working unit of Lutheranism) is twofold: To maintain Word and Sacrament for itself and spread it among new believers; and to provoke unto the good works which are the end and aim of the spiritual power engendered by the means of grace. Every use of the means of grace is to result, in home and congregational situations, in the development of spiritual power. This power is to be used; and the administration of the congregation is to direct these powers into valid channels. Permitted to be dissipated and unused, these powers become a blight on the Church’s program.[5]

According to Caemmerer, the most powerful bloc within the milieu of the Missouri Synod was the clergy. It is imperative to educate the clergy about the significance of being involved

with this kind of work. "Without some sweeping renovation of outlook in the ministry, doctrinally and practically, with regard to the social impact of the Christian congregation, any momentary, propagandistic program in the Church of social action will remain utterly idle."[6]

He discussed the importance of educating the laity in the "life of love" and arousing "the individual Christian to his social awareness. Through the manifold educational activities of the Church, directed by its ministry trained to that end, this realization must be created in a new, direct, startlingly abrupt and fresh fashion: we live to love."[7] Until such time as these measures are put into place and begin to bear fruit "Observation of the social worker [such as the members of ALC] in general may elicit the joy that also in our Church the specialized technique of direct services to humanity is being linked with the dynamic of Christian love; and the warning that the professional worker in the Church may never forget that, while we are saved by a vicarious sacrifice of the Redeemer, we must serve by a sacrifice that is very much our own."[8]

In 1942 Caemmerer wrote and delivered an essay for the Twenty-Fourth Convention of the Atlantic District of the Missouri Synod at Concordia Collegiate Institute entitled "The Lutheran Church Faces the World." By this time he was a professor at Concordia in St. Louis. He wove together his concern for social issues with an anticipation of post-war realities for the church. He made it clear that the church had been through times when it did not hold to its tasks and was consumed by the changes of the world. Sometimes it fled in fear of persecution; sometimes it became the preserve of special privileges of one class. Caemmerer's opening comments addressed the need for the church to adapt without losing itself. "All history has one lesson, which current world disorder is bringing into sharp focus: only useful institutions survive."[9] Caemmerer believed

that part of the church's challenge at this time is the confusion over its business in the world. He goes on to clarify what the Gospel and the primary task of the church really is. "In bringing men into His Kingdom, the Savior is not aiming merely at improvement of conduct and outward conformity with helpful custom. But He is concerned with the total change of man." [10]

To accomplish these tasks the church must be clear about its objectives: "to make disciples of men, to plead with them to be reconciled with God for Christ's sake, and to teach them to observe the things Christ has commanded and to maintain good works." [11] The church's responsibility and field of action is to bring this message to the world in ways and with methods that will be heard and received by the people in their own context. Every human being does not respond in identical ways and so it is the church's responsibility to find the most suitable ways to offer the Gospel message.

Caemmerer says that there are four basic ways that human beings respond to the Gospel. The first is the intellectualist. This person wants to understand. "He is normally the product of a leisure culture, one that has afforded time for study and reflection, one that succeeds generations of learning and investigation." [12] Caemmerer says that this person is from the start against the Gospel because it critiques the human mind and is supernatural, beyond experimental proofs.

The second type is the religionist. This person believes in worshiping God as part of an obligation to do what's right. "He flourishes especially where religion has become an institution, has developed customs and cults, has impressed its community with the rightness of its codes of conduct." [13] Such a person often isn't concerned with the truth of the Word and relationship with God, but is concerned with the external

rituals of the religion. He is not looking to be changed, but to maintain the status quo.

The third type is the emotionalist. This person "is aware of a nagging deficit in life... [He] "is the product of a civilization in decay, damming up the accumulated fears and prejudices of generations." [14] This person is looking for some kind of release from his internal strife and a way to find inner peace.

The last type, according to Caemmerer, is the animalist. This person is primarily concerned with staying alive. "He is at the level of society demanding that he spend his best energies simply earning a living for himself and his dependents. Living means food, clothing, shelter; hence his interests tend to simmer down to them." [15]

How will the Lutheran church address these various types of people with the intention of offering them the Gospel? Caemmerer says that the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod has one great asset – doctrine. In the middle of this doctrine is the teaching of salvation by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. It is not a matter of changing one's behavior patterns, but a matter of trust in Christ for the true change of heart and life which is the foundation of Christianity:

Associated with this doctrine has been an unusually clear interpretation of the place of suffering in the life of man, Christian or non-Christian. Suffering is God's way of speaking to man of his shortcomings, calling him to repentance: suffering for the Christian is God's school to make him more surely and more completely God's own man. These are the clarion notes in the call of the church to a battered, forlorn, sodden world. [16]

The liabilities of the Lutheran church, according to Caemmerer, are its emphasis on money, property and clericalism. Lutheran preaching tends to be argumentative which detracts from the joy of the Gospel that should be expressed and lived in the Christian community:

We rightly define justification as the center of our faith. But justification in the scheme of the Christian religion is not an end: it is a dynamic; it thrusts in the direction of the Christian life; it has a design and purpose in view, that the saved Christian should serve God and man with love. This service is not to be by compulsion; but is to be joyful, thrilling, wholehearted.[17]

He goes on to say that there is a group within the church which is living out both the Gospel preaching and the social issue emphases in its work: "The Associated Lutheran Charities, a worthy professional group, has done much to lend emphasis to the church's obligations toward a world in need in body and soul. But more remains to be done in the routine of the parish and pulpit."[18]

How can the Lutheran church address these issues? Caemmerer says that the Lutherans have been good at reaching people who are willing to listen, but "what will it do for a world that will not look or listen?"[19] He says that the church cannot wait for those who appreciate churchly culture. It is the church's responsibility to develop a strategy and go into the world.

However, for the church to remain the church and not become side-tracked by theologically wrong agendas, "the one true strategy must be built around the means of grace." [20] He says that modern man, especially in the post-war era will be animalistic in nature. To reach such a person:

The people of the church must simply appear different...The one thing that will penetrate the consciousness of animalist man will be a spectacle... the Christian at work, with him. To find in a sea of selfishness and callousness a mooring of kindness; to find one citizen of many who is eager in helpfulness, efficient; one employer who can be kindly, considerate; one friend out of many who will be faithful, forgiving, persistent in giving rather than receiving...that is an experience more than a thought or judgment of theory; that comes like a flash of light in darkness.[21]

It is this moment of light that gives the Christian the opportunity to direct his non-Christian neighbor to the means of grace. It is here that the Christian can interpret for the neighbor how God is working in his life to bring him into relation with God through Christ. To be ready for such connections with the world, the Christian must be trained so that he can live this way from one day to the next. "Each must be so charged with power that he can witness to his world independently and with courage. That takes equipment."[22]

The equipment Caemmerer says each Christian needs is the ability to ask the questions to which most Lutherans memorized the answers long ago in school. "He himself has to know the plan of salvation as a way; he must be able to put it in words."[23] Secondly, the individual must have faith that isn't associated simply with "the classroom or chancel step. It must be life. Life situations must be multiplied, the individual's participation in them fostered, as he is trained for impact."[24]

The third piece of necessary equipment for the Christian is growth in love. "Love is the parallel of the Christian faith. He is equipped with love through the work of the means of grace

in his own life. Love is not a tender flower automatically blooming on the Christian stock. Love is action.”[25] Caemmerer allows that many people may not know what areas of need lie right outside their doors or that they may be put off by the old, weak and sick in their midst. However, the New Testament is clear about the areas of need: Our whole Christian faith moreover, our Gospel of the Cross, is the means by which the Spirit charges the Christian for tasks of love. The individual’s life must become the life of love, of love in action, seizing upon every opportunity, entering every area.[26]

He concludes by emphasizing that carrying out this strategy of the church in the world “is not only suggested, but insisted upon by the Scripture. There has been no time in history when the church had the right to neglect this strategy...Each one of us is God’s man, commissioned with the high charge to show sodden, broken people the glory of God.”[27]

Caemmerer’s thought continued to develop as he ministered at the seminary and in various synodical capacities. Years later he characterized his development this way:

Slowly it began to dawn on me that in my preaching and care of the spiritual life of my people I had more to do than bolster their faith in God. I had to face the fact that God was interested not just in their faith, but in their capacity to love, love one another and love all people. The accent on justification had been useful, and love was not a way for gaining peace with God. But love was a fruit of the righteousness with which God assured them of His favor.[28]

He again addressed the ALC in 1946 with a series of lectures entitled “The Application of Christian Ethics to Current Social Problems.” These essays sought to offer Christian solutions to

post-war issues. However, it was in 1949 that much of his thought along these lines culminated in his book *The Church in the World*. This slim volume crystallized the strategy he sees in the New Testament for living as the church in the world:

Caemmerer is not trying to say everything which the church catholic has said or even ought to say on the church-world topic. He is consciously and unconsciously a Lutheran confessor looking through Pauline eyes at the reality of the church. Therefore he does not make extended comment on any independent doctrine of God or doctrine of creation as a means of understanding the world. Indeed, as a Lutheran it is not likely that he could conceive of an "independent" doctrine or want to develop a doctrine of creation. He sees the creation *sub specie Christi*. [29]

Caemmerer's focus throughout the book is on teaching the Church how to carry the good news of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake into the world – the world, not as challenge or menace, but the world as people "subjects and objects of the cosmic drama of salvation." [30] He says that there are two points which are essential in this task. The first is *agape*, love, "by which the man of the world becomes alert to the fact that he needs help and that the Church has help to give." [31] The second is the *kerygma*, the gospel message. This "second factor is the help itself, the answer of God Himself through the Church to the need of the world." [32] He says that it is not enough for the message to be received by the senses of the hearer. It must "register on the mind of the hearer." [33] How can this be accomplished?

Caemmerer reminds the reader that Christ asked his disciples to be witnesses. This witness, though often including the words of the *kerygma*, is primarily "showing the presence of Jesus Christ

at work in the life of the witness. This witness will be set forth sometimes in words giving the information about the source and origin of this life; but primarily and ordinarily by means of the attitudes and actions which betoken this life at work.”[34] Here is agape in action:

It is the will of the Christian man bent and directed toward the good of the other, the other regardless of claim or chance of return. This love is always a personal thing. It is the response of the heart to the Kingdom or indwelling of God. It is in itself the reaching out of the individual heart to the next individual in need; it is simultaneously being sensitive to need, assuming responsibility for need, devising means of helping in need, sacrificing self for need, all without hope or intention of return.[35]

Caemmerer goes on to enumerate the areas of life that respond to this “Christian conditioning.” He first addresses the family from which all people come and through which human beings learn of life together. He talks of the problems families struggle with today. Business and occupation are the next category which he says is “a field so fertile because love is so unusual there...Where Christian love can operate, and where it seeks particularly under the strains of current economic life to meet the need of people, there witness comes into its own.”[36] Beyond business Caemmerer talks about citizenship and how the “democratic process...has broken down at the point of individual responsibility.”[37]

All of these areas of life stem from the personal, inward man, who is wracked by fears about them all. Though people address these problems in a myriad of ways, it is this underlying fear that drives much of the world’s activity. “The man without God is a man without security. Hence, the most significant aspect

of the inner nature of the man of the world is fear.”[38] Caemmerer says that Christians can reach this man of the world when he sees Christians as “individuals who have resources not only to meet and face their own problems but also to share good cheer and sacrifice with others...” He makes it clear that “...those individuals have an influence much more vital than the formal invitation of the outward institution of the Church.”[39]

All of this effort on the part of the Christian to reach the man of the world has, up to this point, not gotten him to the message which is the actual help each human being needs. However, “the Gospel and the Word of reconciliation works only in those who listen. They listen, we have said, because they have discovered that the people who have the Gospel are people worth listening to, that they have resources for life which they, too, need; they have seen their good works and have found them good for themselves and now are ready for the visitation of God.”[40]

Now is the time when the man of the world will ask “What do you have that I need?” and the Christian can answer:

Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not merely a figure in history past, but He is God now. He not merely died on a cross, but He died that men might be alive with the very life of God now. He died for me, but He also died for you. His dying had that power because He faced a problem that is bigger than any human being can solve, He faced the problem of sin and separation from God; and His death was God’s way of again replacing Himself in our lives and giving us what we need. Our needs are not simply the needs of the body, but of the heart; not simply needs for the gifts of God to our bodies, but for God Himself alive in our inner self. That is what Christ Jesus did, to make possible this gift.[41]

Caemmerer goes on to say that this message needs to be spoken concretely, in language that can reach the person to whom it is addressed. It is critical that it be made available in a way that the person can receive it and claim it as his own. "Finally, the kerygma of the Christian has to be the reflection of his actual self. It has to be a witness."[42]

Caemmerer's position on the church in the world includes pre-evangelical, evangelical and post-evangelical actions. The Christian is compelled by the Gospel to act on behalf of the neighbor: first through love, "Christian conditioning," and then as deliverer of the message itself. Both of these actions move from or toward one central focus – the furtherance of the Good News of Jesus Christ among Christians that leads to furtherance of the Gospel among those outside the church. Caemmerer explicated the theological foundations of Herzberger and other earlier writers and ministers involved with care and redemption work in clear and precise language of his time.

[1] Lueking, 56.

[2] Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., "Lutheran Social Action," Thirty-seventh Annual Convention of Associated Lutheran Charities, 48.

[3] Ibid., 50.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 51.

[6] Ibid., 52.

[7] Ibid., 53.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., "The Lutheran Church Faces the World," Twenty-Fourth Convention of the Atlantic District of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 3.

[10] Ibid., 5.

[11] Ibid., 7.

[12] Ibid., 11.

- [13] Ibid.
 - [14] Ibid.
 - [15] Ibid., 12.
 - [16] Ibid., 19.
 - [17] Ibid., 22.
 - [18] Ibid.
 - [19] Ibid., 23.
 - [20] Ibid.
 - [21] Ibid.
 - [22] Ibid., 24.
 - [23] Ibid., 24.
 - [24] Ibid.
 - [25] Ibid.
 - [26] Ibid., 25.
 - [27] Ibid., 30.
 - [28] Richard R. Caemmerer, "No Continuing City," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, vol. 5, no. 5, October 1978.
 - [29] Martin Marty, "The Church in the World" in *The Lively Function of the Gospel*, edited by Robert W. Bertram, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1966, 138.
 - [30] Marty, 139.
 - [31] Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., *The Church in the World*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1949, 40.
 - [32] Ibid., 41.
 - [33] Ibid.
 - [34] Ibid., 42.
 - [35] Ibid., 44.
 - [36] Ibid., 46.
 - [37] Ibid., 47.
 - [38] Ibid., 48.
 - [39] Ibid., 49.
 - [40] Ibid.
 - [41] Ibid., 50.
 - [42] Ibid., 52.
-

F.W. Herzberger Part Three – Herzberger's Theological Legacy

*Ministries such as City Mission are never done in a vacuum. From the beginning, Herzberger had a variety of people who supported the work he was doing and as he moved out into the community, more and more people were drawn to the needs he was addressing and the way in which he was working. This kind of ministry had its struggles at the turn of the century much as it has today and those who felt called to it banded together in support of one another. It would be the men of the Associated Lutheran Charities, Herzberger's younger colleagues in this work, who will take up the theological conversation that Herzberger started by his actions. Over the next decades they would carry it beyond the confines of City Mission into the wider Missouri Synod community.*The Beginnings of the Associated Lutheran Charities

The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw a burgeoning movement within the Missouri Synod of ministries that included both care and redemption work among the marginalized. Hospitals were started in areas well-populated by Lutherans: Brooklyn, New York in 1881, Cleveland, Ohio in 1896, Mankato, Minnesota and Springfield, Illinois in 1897, Sioux City, Iowa in 1902 and Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1903. Orphanages were also built. John Frederick Buenger, one of the original Saxon immigrants, started the first orphanage in Des Peres, Missouri in 1868. This was followed in 1871 by one in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. "The Addison, Illinois orphanage began in 1873. New Orleans followed in 1881; Indianapolis, Indiana and Marwood, Pennsylvania in 1883; Fort Wadsworth, New York in

1886.”[1] Homes for the aged and, after the turn of the century, home-finding societies for children emerged in much the same way.

All of these efforts were established through grassroots channels with considerable lay support:

One of the Chicago pastoral patriarchs, August Reinke, preached a sermon to his Bethlehem congregation on the duty of Christians to care for the aged in the late 1880’s. Two days later an anonymous donor left twenty-six cents at the church, marked ‘for the Altenheim building fund.’ Reinke simply kept the twenty-six cents on the parish financial books with the notation that the donor intended it to go toward a home for the aged. Thus, for several years the idea stayed alive in the conscience and conversation of the parish fathers. In 1892 twenty-six congregations of the Northern Illinois region – a parish for each penny of the initial donation! – combined to form the Altenheim Gesellschaft and the ministry was underway ‘to establish a home for aged persons in needy and destitute circumstances belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chicago and vicinity.’ Thus Pastor Reinke and his co-workers defined their vision of the task.[2]

In 1899 at the Missouri Synod annual meeting, a request was made that the Synod become the over-arching administrative body for these new ministries. They needed connection and support through a national organization that would acknowledge the realities of such work and its differences from traditional congregational work. The delegates tabled the matter, “offering as a reason the considerable difficulties involved in administering such a burgeoning program.”[3]

Since officially appointed Synod leadership was not going to

happen, Herzberger took matters into his own hands. He gathered those who were directly involved in the ministries and began working with them. In 1901 he joined August Schlechte, city missionary in Chicago, and Frederick Ruhland, institutional missionary in Buffalo, New York for an informal conversation about the work which each of them did. Though initially they were not thinking of starting an oversight organization, this trio was the soil from which Associated Lutheran Charities grew.

This first meeting blossomed into annual conversations that gradually included more and more people. "In November of 1904, seventeen men responded to an invitation to come to Ft. Wayne and formally organize. Seven were active in children's home and placement ministries...two were orphanage directors...two were Lutheran hospital representatives...and five city missionaries were on hand." [4] Officers were elected, a name was chosen, *Lutherische Wohltätigkeits Konferenz* – Associated Lutheran Charities [ALC] – and the organization which would coordinate such ministries in the Missouri Synod for the next half century was born.

The agenda for the meetings addressed issues critical to these ministries. Should illegitimate children be taken from their mothers? Should adoptive families be subject to supervision by the adoptive agency? If yes, who should do the supervision, an adoption agency or the parish pastor? What was the relationship between home-finding organizations and orphanages? Should illegitimate children be accepted by home-finding organizations and orphanages?

One particularly thorny issue discussed in 1905 was the validity of calling a pastor to a home-finding organization. The Missouri Synod's aversion to allowing pastors to be called by any entity other than a traditional congregation made this

issue of paramount importance:

The whole concept of a specialized welfare ministry was still in the tender stages of its earliest beginnings at the time. Therefore, it must have struck the rest of the Synodical constituency, and especially the other clergy of the Synod as something of a bold step for the convening pastors to conclude that the call to service in a welfare ministry of a home-finding society is divinely authorized. The basis of the declaration was found in Christ's command to teach all nations recorded in St. Matthew 28:19. Any pastor who is thus called to a ministry to children and families has the right to baptize, remit and retain sins, and administer the Lord's Supper to those under the care of the institution or agency.[5]

These concerns about the place of welfare ministries within the pastoral ministerium continued to be part of the agenda of the ALC meetings for many years.

The 1911 annual gathering was of particular significance for the men of the ALC. Synodical president Frederick Pfotenhauer participated as well as St. Louis seminary professors, Theodore Graebner, Paul E. Kretzmann and W.H.T. Dau. This show of support for the organization was an important boost for the validity of their work. Dau spoke to the gathered assembly and urged them to watch their public communications so that they couldn't be accused of unchurch-like work. "One persistent misrepresentation of the spirit of the welfare ministry was that it catered to the physical needs of people and the church was on earth not to care for bodies but for souls."[6]

Another concern was about any ministry which might take away from the primacy of the congregation. At this time, Sunday schools, laymen's groups, and even youth ministries could be

considered suspect if they diverted time and attention away from the Word and Sacrament core of the Missouri Synod world. The ALC had a long, slow climb to complete synodical acceptance and this show of support from important guests was a significant step up.

These annual meetings were also an entry point for connections between the Missouri Synod world and the wider world of the culture. "Civil authorities" were invited to participate and speak as early as 1912. "The 1919 convention of the ALC in Fort Wayne featured as plenary session speakers Dr. Amos Butler of the Indiana Board of State Charities and a county probation officer, Mr. Fred Klein." [7] Both the church and the state have responsibilities to care of the population of the nation and it was natural that this part of the church was more open to conversation with the wider world. It was through this venue that Herzberger initiated his efforts to bring the deaconess movement into the Missouri Synod and through it, into the wider community.

This connection was important just before and during World War I when negative sentiment about German-Americans was running high. As people outside the Missouri Synod saw the good work being done by the ALC ministries on behalf of the community, their respect for the Synod rose and partially ameliorated the previous perception of the Synod as a religious enigma.

The ALC provided a place for conversation about the work of these ministries and made room for reflection on their work. Care and redemption ministry to the marginalized is so time-consuming and all encompassing that without an external framework of support, serious reflection on the work tends to fall by the wayside. Keeping up with the crises and day-to-day realities of people living in need and struggling to survive can absorb every waking moment of the leaders of such

ministries. The men who carried the ALC ministries with Herzberger and the men who came after he was gone had the opportunity, through the ALC, to reflect together theologically on their work for each other and distant colleagues who needed such writings.

[1] Lueking, 19.

[2] Ibid, 20.

[3] Synodical Proceedings, 1899.

[4] Lueking, 23.

[5] Ibid. 26.

[6] Ibid. 27.

[7] Ibid. 28.

F.W. Herzberger Part Two

*[F.W. Herzberger was the first Lutheran city missionary in St. Louis. His City Mission was the founding organization of Lutheran Ministries Association, now Humanitri. His example of passion for the Gospel and for the people he served as well as his perseverance against opposition and rousing indifference intrigued me and led me to dig further. Here, is part two of my work about him.]*Herzberger's first work in St. Louis after coming to the city on June 4, 1899 was at the Temporary City Hospital at 17th and Pine where Dr. H.L. Nietert was superintendent. Herzberger stated that "I found plenty to do among the spiritually neglected patients and preached my first sermon on the text Matthew 11:28 (come unto me, etc.) on the Sunday following in a vile smelling little cellar room before perhaps twenty hearers." [1]

Herzberger's second stop was the Female Hospital, originally the Social Evil Hospital, on Arsenal Street where female TB patients, women with other chronic illnesses, and poor working women without family support were cared for. Though Herzberger's call was individual soul-saving, his compassionate instincts flowed beyond the preaching of the Gospel to include helping people with their other needs as well. Herzberger's experiences with the women institutionalized at the Female Hospital led him, within a year, to start Martha's Home, a boardinghouse, for young women coming to the city to find work.

Herzberger's propensity for stretching his ministry beyond his official call, which had been begun with his first congregations, was part of his City Mission work from the beginning as this example with the poor working women illustrates. He began his work by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, redemption work, but in reaching out to people in need, he instinctively incorporated aspects of care ministry as well. Herzberger, in his efforts on behalf of the myriad of people he worked with during a given week, exemplified both law and gospel ministries.

During that first week of his life as city missionary Herzberger also visited the Poor House where he met an old man, a former Lutheran. "He told me that he had been sitting in his invalid chair for seventeen years and never had a minister of our Church call upon him. As he did not wish to die and be buried like a dog, he had turned a Catholic." [2]

Herzberger commented that other German men in the Poor House told him that they didn't care which Protestant service they participated in because they were all the same. He responded to this statement in true Lutheran style: "This sad state of affairs caused the writer to hold sermons on Luther's Small Catechism on Friday afternoons for the German inmates, and so

wonderfully did the Lord bless His Word on the hearts of these hearers that they resolved to form among themselves a Lutheran congregation of the pure Word and Sacrament and to call the writer as their pastor.”[3]

On Arsenal Street near the Female Hospital stood the Sanitarium or Insane Asylum which was also part of Herzberger’s ministry territory. Initially, the superintendent of the facility, Dr. Runge, would not give permission for the Lutheran city missionary to preach to the inmates because of his previous experiences with “sensational” preachers who “unduly excited the patients and did more harm than good.” But once Runge was told what denomination Herzberger represented, “he gave his permission, stating that he knew the Missouri Synod and its sober way of preaching.”[4]

Herzberger also had to convince Captain Huebler, head of the jail called Four Courts, to allow him to talk with the inmates – not because of the possibility of undue excitement among the men, but because “those boys are beyond redemption.” Nonetheless, Herzberger persevered and began holding services in the jail twice a month. One of his comments about the inmates in the jail was that only two or three miscreants had attended Lutheran schools and “not a single Lutheran girl had darkened our Jail.”[5]

Education has always been a significant part of Lutheran ministry. Luther’s focus on education, whether at home or in the public arena, has informed Lutheran ministry, particularly Missouri Synod ministry, throughout the world ever since. St. Louis Germans, even those who didn’t agree with the Missouri Synod religious stance, sent their children to Missouri Synod schools. Very early on, St. Louisans realized the high quality of Lutheran schools. City mission was no exception to this rule. Herzberger, through the efforts of W. Runge, a Lutheran

teacher and two seminary students, began the city mission's first school in 1900, the second year of the mission's operation. At the corner of Second and Plum on the day after Labor Day fifty children of various backgrounds came together to learn.

Though by this time St. Louis had a public school system that served part of the youthful population of the city, the immigrant children who would have come to City Mission's school would probably not have had access to the public education available to more well-to-do and established residents of the city. The anticipation and yet also the risks of starting such a new venture are evident in Runge's words in *The City Missionary* newsletter about the opening of the school:

Monday being Labor Day, school opened on the day following. With what secret fear we went to the school that first day, accompanied by our faithful helpers, Students Maschoff and Buenger! What if all our prayers and work would prove in vain? What if no children would be present? But who can describe our joy when at the school door we were hailed by over fifty happy, noisy children; children clean and children dirty; German, English, Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Armenian children. We kept school with a happy heart that day and are doing so still every afternoon.

As with most ministries of this type, the City Mission School continued operating and providing education for children in difficult circumstances until 1941 when the money ran out.

The first annual report of the St. Louis Lutheran City Mission summarizes the work Herzberger started and continued to build until his death in 1930:

Under the visible guidance and blessing of the Risen Head of

His Church our Lutheran City Mission has completed its first year's work and presents with much gratitude to its friends and patrons the following report: Mission-stations, 11: City Hospital, Poor House, Insane Asylum, Four Courts, Female Hospital, Memorial Home, Bethesda Incurable Home, Bethesda Maternity Home, Workhouse, Mission Home for Men, Martha Home. Attendance at divine services, 7,366; sick-communions, 20; baptisms, 5 (2 adults); burials, 2; marriage, 1; pupils who have attended hospital mission school, 37; lodgers in Mission Home on Second Street, 437; servant girls at Martha Home, 6; destitute persons provided with clothing and shoes, 30; assisted with tickets to reach home, 6; old spectacles distributed, 200.[7]

Herzberger's passion for the good news of Jesus Christ and his compassion for the marginalized of his day are apparent in this list of his activities during the first year of City Mission's work. Besides the work of this official call, he had also started new organizations to help those in need that were falling through the holes in the existing safety nets in place in the city. When he saw a need Herzberger moved to address that need as best he could with the resources at his disposal, but he didn't do it alone.

One of Herzberger's first supporters was H. Achenbach who owned Achenbach Apothecary on Market Street. Herzberger set up an office there and all donations and business matters were directed to Achenbach at that address. As with many Lutheran ministry endeavors, it was laypeople like Achenbach who sustained work that the church body itself would not directly support. The Lutheran Mission Aid Society was formed to do just this early in the life of City Mission and gave Herzberger steady support throughout his ministry. Mrs. A. Rohlfing was the founder of the Ladies Aid Society, which was begun in the

fall of 1900. Mrs. Rohlfing gathered other Lutheran women who were sympathetic to the causes of City Mission and they formed a society "whose object should be to alleviate all suffering found among our poor City Mission charges and, above all, to raise funds for the purchase of a suitable school and chapel in the newly opened mission district on Second Street." [8] By 1920 they were instrumental in establishing the Lutheran Convalescent Home as well. [9]

Of course all of this work took a great deal of money. The Ladies Mission Aid Society was one of the main sources of support for Herzberger and the work of City Mission, but, as with all ministries like this, asking for additional funds from sympathetic sources was an ongoing effort. Much of Herzberger's writing, particularly in "The Missionary News," the official newsletter of the organization, was dedicated to highlighting the numbers of people helped in all the various ways that City Mission reached out. It was imperative that it be clear that money sent to City Mission ministries was money well spent. He was effusive in his praise of dedicated Lutherans who continued to support the work, but he was also willing to pull heart strings:

For the last years our Christians in St. Louis have supported the work most loyally by putting it on their congregational budget and also by private gifts of love...At a recent Board of Directors' meeting our treasury showed a deficit of \$239. Certainly none of us who love the Lord's work done in our flourishing City Mission wants it to decrease, nor does any one surely want our treasury to sink deeper into debt or have our missionaries not promptly paid. If every one of us will add but a little bit more to his or her contribution during the coming "lean" months of summer and fall until our congregations increase their budget for the blessed work in the coming year, we shall have sufficient funds to carry on

our work.[10]

Members of the board got involved when the financial struggles became too great:

Shall the blessed work of our St. Louis City Mission be discontinued? Is it possible that our Christians here have lost interest in this work? The rich man in the Gospel at least permitted Lazarus at his door to have the crumbs from his table and shall we neglect to give the Gospel crumbs to the poor, the destitute, the sick and the forsaken whom we have been ministering to in our City Mission?

Look at these questions again before you read on. Do you say: Is it as bad as all that? Yes, it is. Our City Mission treasury now has a deficit of \$1,800.00. We cannot continue borrowing money month after month as we have been doing for the last six months. Our churches must either supply the funds or the City Mission Board will have to reduce still more the number of our workers. The board has been keeping down expenses as far as possible. In school we now have only one teacher in place of the two formerly, the enrollment of children being only 45. And yet we have a deficit every month.[11]

After World War 1 the hospital administrator of City Hospital, Miss Allison, asked the Lutheran City Mission if they would be able to provide a female social worker to help with the female patients. Mrs. A. Vellner who had been working with various City Mission endeavors for many years was suggested and began work at the hospital. The 1923 report on her work explains its nature: "Conferences on different cases 138, errands for patients, 1,462; telephone messages, 2,040; letters written for patients, 149. She made 173 home visits, secured temporary homes for 18; crutches for 16; crutch-tips for 17; stationery

for 23; reading-matter for 28; supplied 95 garments; found employment for 10; secured glasses for 8; surgical appliances for 4; burial for 1; baptism for 2; legal aid and quite a number of other things.”[12]

[1] F.W. Herzberger. Does Our City Mission Pay? Unpublished manuscript, Concordia Historical Instituted archives.

[2] Ibid.

[3] F.W. Herzberger. Twenty-Five Rich Harvest Years. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1924, 8.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] The City Missionary date?

[7] Herzberger. Twenty Five Rich Harvest Years.

[8] “Twenty-Five Rich Harvest Years,” 19.

[9] Lueking, 14.

[10] “The Missionary News” vol.8, no.5, May 1923, 2.

[11] Louis J. Sieck, personal correspondence, Concordia Historical archives, November 6, 1918.

[12] Twenty-Five Rich Harvest Years, 16.

Rev. Robin Morgan

Part One – F.W. Herzberger

The next four weeks (while I’m in charge and before Ed and Marie get back from Europe and over jet-lag) are going to be devoted to some research I did to discover how Lutherans in earlier generations did city ministry. I was working in the city of St. Louis at the time and was concerned about the struggles I had doing care and redemption ministries in that

context. [For a clear explanation of care and redemption ministries look at <https://crossings.org/archive/ed/God.pdf>] I decided to look for Lutherans in previous generations who had done what I was trying to do and see if I could learn from them. So I began to hunt around a bit and discovered F.W. Herzberger in the Concordia Historical archives. Herzberger was the first Lutheran city missionary in St. Louis. His City Mission was the founding organization of Lutheran Ministries Association, now Humanitri. His example of passion for the Gospel and for the people he served as well as his perseverance against opposition and rousing indifference intrigued me and led me to dig further. Here, for the next four weeks, is part of the fruit of my labor.

Robin Morgan

F.W. Herzberger was an inspired choice to be the first city missionary in the Missouri Synod in St. Louis. A pastor was needed who spoke and could preach in English (English didn't become the language of choice in the Missouri Synod until World War 1). They also needed someone who could go into the institutions of the city and reach "lost Lutherans" as well as touch the lives of others struggling to survive outside the normal channels of life in the city. Herzberger's personal history, professional background and, most importantly, faith in Jesus Christ were woven together in such a way that he would passionately spend the rest of his life building the ministries of the City Mission that endure to this day.

Fredrick William Herzberger was born in 1859. His father was a Lutheran pastor in the Ohio Synod and served as a chaplain in the Union army until his death in 1861. Shortly before he passed away, his father wrote on a slip of paper, "Fritz shall be a pastor." Herzberger's mother followed his father's wishes

and enrolled Herzberger in the Missouri Synod's ministerial preparatory school in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1875. He finished his studies for the ministry at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis in 1882.[1]

His first parish experience was in the northwest region of Arkansas. He and his wife, Martha Schroeter, served in the area of Johnson County where a colony of Germans had been moved from Wisconsin by the St. Louis and Iron Mountain Railroad Company to develop the land. During his four years in this area Herzberger started six congregations. Here in Arkansas he had his first experience as a leader in care ministry on behalf of his community in addition to his Word and Sacrament duties. During his tenure in the Ozarks, three years of crop failure left the people on the verge of starvation. On his own initiative, Herzberger went to the railroad company and petitioned the officials to help the people through this time by supplying them with seeds so that they could grow enough vegetables to keep from starving to death.[2]

Even in this early, short-term pastoral experience, Herzberger was confronting care and redemption realities, which he juggled throughout his ministry. As the shepherd of his flock, he did what needed to be done to help his people survive during difficult times. The pastoral office, which in the Lutheran church is defined by Word and Sacrament ministry alone, was stretched as Herzberger sought the help of the railroad company. The reality of his parishioners' lives pulled him beyond the traditional role of his calling.

Herzberger's next call took him to Carson, Kansas. He was in Carson for a very short time before an injury to his right hand forced him to leave the congregation and spend several months recuperating with an uncle who was an official at the federal prison in Leavenworth, Kansas. "During these quiet days of

recovery, he had a first hand opportunity to see the plight of prisoners and grasp some of the problems with which prison officials must cope.”[3]

Because the injury to his hand was so severe in those days before antibiotics, Herzberger had to extend his recovery time beyond his stay in Leavenworth. He and his family moved to Chicago where he did some temporary pastoral work while they lived with friends. It was during this period that he wrote a book of poetry, *Pilgrim Songs*. These poems illuminated Herzberger’s passion for the Gospel and his struggles with what he was sure would be his death at an early age. Thankfully, God spared him and he lived for many years after this accident.

Herzberger’s next long-term assignment was ten years at a congregation in Hammond, Indiana. During his time in Hammond he continued his habit of speaking up on worldly issues that affected his flock. One of his parishioners was killed in the 1894 Pullman strike and Herzberger responded by speaking directly from the pulpit about the situation. He called for both the “rich capitalists” and the “greedy laborers” to repent. That same year he spoke about what he considered to be “spiritual foot-dragging” after a visit to the Lutheran school for Negroes in Concord, North Carolina:

It cannot be denied, love for the Negro mission task has become cold among many of us. Why? Does it not come about because so many among us think: ‘Why bother about the Negro? We can use our money better than to waste it on such people.’ Listen! You can have so many houses and properties and farms and businesses and factories – yes, you can acquire the whole world, and yet with all that, you do not yet possess what every Negro needs above all else. That is the precious blood of Jesus Christ, poured out also for him as well as for you who have been delivered from the anxious worry of sin for the

Son of God...[4]

Such words wouldn't have been the norm for pastors at that time. In fact, many clergymen probably agreed with the thought that "we can use our money better than to waste it on such people." Yet, Herzberger spoke out, even though he was not directly involved with these ministries. It seems that his passion for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ overruled socially prescribed boundaries that most people, including most Lutherans, were not willing to venture beyond. Herzberger possessed an urgency about sharing the Good News, which would not be thwarted by the conventions of the day.

He reiterated his sentiments about ministry with African-Americans many years later in a poem that opened a pamphlet entitled "Unsere Negermission in Wort und Bild." The pamphlet highlights the work of the Missouri Synod among African Americans in many different parts of the country. Herzberger's poem, "The Negro Child's Plea," calls for the people of the synod to respond to the cry from the child (above the poem on the page is a picture of a young black boy kneeling in prayer). One stanza has the child asking for help that he might have Jesus' word in church and school, that he might hear Jesus' grace preached until he goes to his grave.[5]

Though certainly a man of his time and cultural circumstances, Herzberger's passion for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ called him across social boundaries that were clearly delineated. In crossing those boundaries he also witnessed suffering that drew him into care ministry as well. "In the seventeen years following his seminary graduation, F. W. Herzberger had a range of experiences with the suffering and the outcast that exceeded most of his pastoral colleagues of that day." [6] All of this care and redemption experience would

soon be put to use in his new call as city missionary in St. Louis.

Herzberger's Call to St. Louis

Though St. Louis was still near the apex of its importance on the national scene[7], the city had problems with housing, immigrant relations and the ongoing struggle of industrialization like all other American cities of the time. By 1900, St. Louis' growth was beginning to slow down, especially in relation to its Midwestern rival, Chicago. The economic depression of 1893-97 hampered industrial growth and "this crisis exacerbated the long-standing malaise of the cotton and wheat growers of the South and West, both of key importance to St. Louis." [8] The river corridor between St. Louis and Philadelphia had been superseded by the railroad corridor between New York and Chicago and St. Louis' life as the premier city of the Midwest was over, even if St. Louis didn't yet acknowledge it.

Lutheran pastors in St. Louis began to see that ministry needed to be offered to the masses of Germans who were being neglected in the upheaval of such rapid change. The ongoing influx of immigrants from Europe continued to flood the congregations of these pastors. With their burgeoning parish work, often trying to minister to congregations ranging in size from several hundred to several thousand, these city pastors saw no way to do the work themselves that was needed to reach the sick, the delinquent and the aged.[9]

St. Louis Lutheran clergymen realized that many Germans, including Lutherans, were in the public institutions of the city and beyond the ken of their daily pastoral routines.[10] By the 1890s, the time was ripe for the Lutherans to begin doing their part to care for the poor of the community. The

Missouri synod community was now well established in the city and they were in position to add their efforts to those long since begun by other denominations and civic organizations. Martin Sommer, a professor at Concordia Seminary reported on their decision to begin City Mission:

It was some time before 1899 that a number of pastors of St. Louis, MO at a city conference urged the duty of the church to inaugurate the work of bringing the Word of God to the inmates of our hospitals, prisons, poor houses, and asylums. Prominent among those who favored this project were the Rev. Dr. C.C.Schmidt and the Rev. Otto Hanser. After a meeting of pastors and laymen had been called, the organization of the St. Louis Mission Society was effected. This society consisted of the representatives of the different Lutheran congregations of St. Louis. In 1899 these combined congregations called the Rev. F.W. Herzberger of Hammond, Indiana, as city missionary of their city.[11]

Though there was no money through the structures of the church body to pay for this venture, two of the laymen present at that meeting, A.G. Brauer and J.F. Schuricht, quietly committed to funding the first two years of the city missionary's salary. Brauer owned the Brauer Supply Company on Fourth Street in the heart of an area of deep poverty within the city. He had seen the struggles of the poor first hand and had helped as many as he could with food, clothing and shoes. The time was right to call Herzberger.[12]

Der Lutheraner, the official news organ of the Missouri Synod at the time, reported Herzberger's work this way on June 27, 1899: "A number of our local congregations have called a pastor and preacher who is not bound to any individual congregation, but who is to devote his whole time and strength to mission-

work, especially in our public charity institutions. For instance, he will daily visit our large City Hospital and look after the spiritual needs of those among the hundreds of patients who have no church connections, especially the lost and wayward sons and daughters of our Lutheran Church. He will comfort the sick, prepare the dying for a blessed end, call the attention of such as are recovering to our churches, and direct them to our pastors."

In the same article the author, Rev. Prof. L. Fuerbringer, D.D., made clear to the Missouri Synod population that "an entirely new missionary movement had begun in their midst. Hitherto our Missouri Synod churches had been busy establishing congregations in the West and Northwest, doing mission-work among the Negroes in the South, jointly with the Synodical Conference, and had also entered the foreign mission field in India. But here was something new. The object of this mission-work was not to found congregations, but to do individual soul-saving work among the hundreds, nay, thousands of poor neglected Lazaruses lying at our very doors in our large cities." [13]

The sense of urgency to do such mission work must have been significant among the area leaders since calling a clergyman to minister without a congregation was a big step outside the norm for the Missouri Synod community. All clergy were to be accountable to a congregation and their calls were not valid unless they came from a congregation. Even seminary professors were obliged to have at least a "paper" call to a congregation. This was the synod's way of keeping the clergy from wielding more power than their office allowed. The legacy of Stephan continued to shape the way ministry could be done among the Saxon Lutherans.

-
- [1] F. Dean Lueking. A Century of Caring: 1868-1968, St. Louis: Board of Social Ministry, LC-MS. 1968, 10.
- [2] Ibid., 11.
- [3] Ibid.
- [4] Ibid, 12.
- [5] Unsere Negermission in Wort und Bild. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1914, 7.
- [6] Lueking, 12.
- [7] James Neal Primm. Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri. Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing, 1981, 289. After the Civil War, many editors of newspapers in the middle of the country set up a campaign to get the capitol of the U.S. moved to the Midwest. Because of St. Louis' prominence at the time, it was one of the front runners in this campaign. DeBow's Review of New Orleans argued that "St. Louis with its healthful climate, beautiful highlands, and metropolitan character, with its central situation in the midst of our greatest industries, and equally accessible to all parts of the country...should be made the Capitol of the United States."
- [8] Ibid. 346.
- [9] Lueking. 9.
- [10] Ibid. 357.
- [11] Martin S. Sommer. The Birth of Lutheran City Mission in St. Louis. Unpublished manuscript, LMA archives.
- [12] Ronald J. Schlegel. Lutheran Mission Association: An Interpretative History. Unpublished manuscript, LMA archives, 3-4.
- [13] F.W. Herzberger, Twenty-Five Rich Harvest Years, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1924, 6.
-

Priests and Programmers: Technologies of Power in the Engineered Landscape of Bali

**Priests and Programmers: Technologies of Power in
the Engineered Landscape of Bali**

By J. Stephen Lansing

Princeton and Oxford: Princeton Univ. Press

**2007 [Reprint of 1991 original] xxxii,183 pp.,
paper, \$18.95**

Review by Edward H. Schroeder

If this review were not destined for a scholarly journal, it might begin like this: "Green Revolution ruins rice harvest in Bali. Water temples re-invoked to rescue rice production." When Western benefactors of scientific agriculture with their hybrid seeds, commercial fertilizer and chemical pesticides moved in to revolutionize rice production, they brought catastrophe. Like the Dutch colonist conquerors before them they noticed the "water temples," but saw them merely as items of Balinese religion, and thus irrelevant for growing rice. Too bad. In the author's own words: "The water temples are a social system that manages (sic!) production [of rice]. Removing the temples from the control of production ultimately threatens the entire productive system." (123)

The author is a multi-discipline professor in the departments of Anthropology and Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Arizona. Bali is his bailiwick. His five (at least) books, dozens of articles and films as well—[<http://press.princeton.edu/titles/8349.html>] on the

strange and wonderful, culturally complex and enigmatic world of Bali signal his expertise. With admirable clarity he introduces us to the “Aha!” about water temples and their “waters of power,” ignored by Western invaders and visitors from the beginning. When he moves to analyse his findings, the clarity persists, but the water gets deep. He draws us in to conversation with the social philosophies of Hegel, Marx, Habermas, Foucault—and even a citation from ancient Virgil: “Fortunate is he who has found the gods of the countryside.”

Lansing has “found the gods of the [Balinese] countryside” whose water-power sustains rice agriculture from planting to harvest. In this book we learn who they are, what they do, and what the Balinese do with and for them so that there will be another rice harvest next year. Simple it is not, for the deities of Hindu-animist Balinese culture and their respective jurisdictions constitute a labyrinth. E.g., the temple of the supreme Water Goddess at the Batur Crater Lake has altars for over 40 additional deities. At least as extensive is the multitude of heavenly beings worshipped alongside the God of Fire at the Besakih temple on the even bigger Agung volcano right next door.

Comment on the back cover says it best: “Lansing describes the networks of water temples that manage the flow of irrigation water in the name of the Goddess of the Crater Lake. Based on a system of power relations so foreign to Western ideas that it was overlooked by colonial administrators, the practical role of the temples remained unnoticed until the advent of the “Green Revolution” of the 1970s. Using the technique of ecological simulation modeling as well as cultural and historical analysis, Lansing argues that the material and the symbolic form a single complex – a historically evolving system of productive relationships. The symbolic system of temple rituals is not merely a reflection of utilitarian constraints but also a basic ingredient in the organization of production.”

This is fascinating cultural anthropology, even history of religions. Why should it interest missiologists?

Here's the interest it has for this ASM member. I wish I'd seen Lansing's 1991 original edition before Marie and I did our volunteer stint as ecumenical partners with the Balinese Protestant Christian Church back in 1999.

Besides the official work we were asked to do, we kept pursuing our own research curiosity with Balinese Hindus who had become Christ-confessors. Punning on the term "Good News," we'd ask: "What was 'good,' what was 'new' in the Jesus-story presented to you that was compelling enough for you to move your trust to him?" Many a marvelous answer came our way. But in almost every case, we heard "But I also had to move out of my village, abandon all my property. I could no longer make sacrifices to the Balinese gods, and thus I was an intolerable threat to the entire village. Without the sacrifices catastrophe would come. I had to go."

I wish I had asked:

1. Since you now believe that the God and Father of Jesus is the Lord of the rice fields, could you in any way have perhaps at first added Him or introduced Him, as St. Paul did in Athens, as a hitherto unknown god with a hand in the rice harvest?
2. Could you in any way as a Christ-confessor have continued with the old rituals, "baptizing" them in your heart as thank-offerings to the Triune God instead of petitionary sacrifices to the water gods to guarantee the harvest?
3. Does Martin Luther's distinction between God's left hand at work in the daily routines of life and God's right hand work of salvation in Jesus suggest a possibility? Namely, rice and all that it entails is God's ongoing preserving

and protecting care for humankind in his creation. God is to be revered and thanked in those daily-life routines, but salvation is not to be found there. It is in Christ, the unique gift from God's right hand, that even the best of fallen humankind finds their rescue and redemption. This might lead to a different message from the Christ-confessor to his fellow villagers if/when the harvest fails: this is God's call for repentance and not for re-intensified sacrifice.

Does the Naaman story (2 Kings 5) offer a precedent? After being healed by the God of Israel he tells Elisha, "Your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the LORD." But then he adds this codicil: "But may the LORD pardon your servant on one account: when my master [the king of Syria] goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down may the LORD pardon your servant on this one count." And Elisha said to him, "Go in peace."

Would the Naaman nuance work at the water temples? I wish I had asked.