

Crossings in Indonesia and Preaching from Old Testament Texts

Colleagues,

Back in 1963—that's 45 years ago—Armencius Munthe, Batak Lutheran pastor from Sumatra, Indonesia, was a grad student in theology at the University of Hamburg (Germany) at the same time as I was. We've stayed in touch over the years. On our last Global Mission Volunteer assignment—mostly in Singapore—Marie and I flew over to Sumatra to visit Armencius and his family for a few days. He'd recently retired from leading roles in Sumatran church life—bishop, seminary prof (or was he even president?) and ecumenical leader. We saw him “live”—even in retirement—in several of those contexts. Highlight, for sure, was to accompany him on a pastoral call out to a village where a dear Grandma had just died. She was lying “in state” on the dirt floor with family gathered round. We'll never forget what we witnessed.

Armencius has been on this Crossings listserve for some time. He's no stranger to our habits and predilections. So it came as no surprise last month when he sent an email saying that he's going to be doing “diagnosis/prognosis method” among his own pastoral colleagues. And might I give him a few tips. For this week's ThTh post, here's the correspondence that transpired.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Dear Ed, next week – 13/4/08 – I will give a lecture to pastors in Medan, here in Indonesia. They are from several

denominations but most of them are Lutheran. I will give them *Diagnosis/Prognosis* method. On 20 April 2008 the assigned sermon-text in all churches is Josua 6:15-20. I would like to give a special explanation about it. Please help me how to explain it through *Diag/Prog* theory.

Thanks a lot. Armencius

Which prompted this from me. [Some German pops up here and there, but most of it is “easy” Deutsch.]

Dear Armencius, Every time your marvelous name pops up on our computer I remember our common heritage of theological study at Hamburg University in Germany in ancient days—1963, I believe it was. And our more recent time with you and your family when we visited you in Medan, Indonesia in 2004.

Here are some thoughts about Joshua 6 and Crossings method for studying texts—

- 1. First thought: It may be IMPOSSIBLE to preach a CHRISTIAN sermon from that text about the Fall of Jericho. Did the people who decided this have any idea what they were doing when they prescribed: “On 20 April 2008 the Textpredigt in all churches is Joshua 6:15-20”? Do they ever ask: “How can we preach Christ from a Christ-less text?” The assignment for a Christian preacher is NOT “Preach a Bible text” but “Preach Christ.” If you cannot find Christ, or find a way to get to Christ from an OT text, then that text is NO GOOD—never good—as a text for Christian preaching.*
- 2. There is no Gospel in this Joshua text (even though the name Joshua = the Hebrew name for Jesus!). It tells of God destroying a city as part of the Israelite holocaust of all the people of Canaan (v.21). At best that is pure*

Gesetz. At worst it is an early version of what Israelis today are doing to the Palestinian people living in Jericho now. [My own view is that this text is a text of Hebrews committing mass murder and genocide—the theology of the “Deuteronomist,” but not the theology of Yahweh.] Yes, there is salvation of a kind. Rahab gets saved, but not sola fide. Rather it is because of her “good works” in hiding the spies. Is that anything close to NT parainesis? I don’t think so.

3. To preach a Christian sermon from an Old Testament text is always a hard job.
4. It is very easy to preach a JEWISH sermon from OT texts, to talk about God, even to talk about sin and salvation. Most of the sermons I have heard in Christian churches on OT texts would fit perfectly in a Jewish synagogue. They do not proclaim Christ. They do proclaim God, but a Christ-less God. Very often Christ is never mentioned in the sermon. So they are Jewish, sometimes even Muslim sermons, but not the Christian gospel.
5. When I have challenged such preachers, they tell me: “But I am JUST preaching what’s in the text. If Christ is not in the text, then I’m still being faithful to the text when I don’t speak his name in the sermon.” To my ears that is a form of idolatry, putting a Bible text (because it is HOLY Scripture!) in place of the Crucified and Risen Messiah.
6. Yes, there is never any EXPLICIT Jesus-talk in OT texts, never any explicit mention, or USE, of his cross/resurrection in OT texts. Even the many “promissio” texts of the OT are still empty of Christ. And no surprise, Christ has not (yet) come to Fill-FULL those promises. That happened only when Christ came. The calendar dates are: from Bethlehem to Pentecost.
7. So if you are going to preach a Christian sermon on an OT

text, you first of all have to ask: where is THE promissio (yes, in its not-yet-fulfilled “promise” form) in this OT text? If the promissio is NOT there, can I find it in the context of this text? If I want to “stick to the OT text”—and preach a Christian (not Jewish) sermon, then my task is to find a way to get from the OT text to proclaim the NT Christ.

8. I can't find any way to get to Christ from this Joshua 6 text. As students you and I learned in Hamburg that Joshua is a book of “Deuteronomic History.” Its message is fundamentally Gesetz. And maybe even worse than that, legalism. Israel is preserved when they keep the law; they are destroyed when they don't. There is no promise-trusting that I can find in Joshua. I wonder if that may be one reason why Joshua is never mentioned anywhere in the books of the NT.
9. Why not tell your presbyters what I have said above. Make it your own thoughts. Tell them “I, Armencius Munthe, cannot find any easy way to preach a Christian sermon from this text. Can we work together to see if we can find a way? And if we cannot find a way, then let us discuss what we should do on Sunday April 20.” It may be that you and they will be able to find a way to do that. I cannot. If they cannot find a way to get to Christ from this Joshua text, then that very fact may be the most God-pleasing learning they will take home. That may well be a wisdom that they never had before. And possibly also for the committee that assigned that text as “Predigttext” for a Christian (even Lutheran!) sermon.
10. You might even be so brash as to ask: “If we cannot get to Christ from this text, should we refuse to use it as our Predigttext? What would any of the NT apostles do in such a case? What would Jesus do?”
11. That might also be something for you and your colleagues

to discuss. Zum Beispiel:

- a. Why is Joshua never mentioned anywhere in the NT?
 - b. Does that mean that none of the apostles, nor Jesus either, was able to proclaim Christ from Joshua texts?
 - c. Throughout the NT there are many “sermons” –from Jesus, Peter, Paul, etc.–that actually start with an OT text, for that was the only “Bible” they had.
 - d. So you might take one of these NT sermons and study how they do it. How to preach Christ from an OT text that does not mention his name.
 - e. One good example, I think, is Peter’s Pentecost sermon. He starts with a “Yom Jahweh” (Day of the Lord) text from Joel. The text ends in destruction and then has this final line: “[But] whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.” Help your presbyters study Acts 2 to learn how Peter does it, how he gets from Joel to Jesus. If you succeed in that, they can say, It wasn’t Armencius who taught us this; it was St. Peter himself.
12. This might be helpful for you personally. One of our very best diagnosis/prognosis theologians in the Crossings Community is Jerry Burce, now pastor in Ohio USA. He was born and raised on the mission field of Papua New Guinea. Beginning with the current Church Year (starting in Advent 2007) Jerry has been leading the Crossings team in doing diagnosis/prognosis studies of the OT texts now assigned for Sunday services in our lectionary. He has spelled out a Crossings “method” for doing this. It’s called “How to Preach the Christian Gospel from Old Testament Texts.” It’s on the Crossings website <www.crossings.org> Here is its URL” <https://crossings.org/thursday/2007/thur041207.shtml>
- I think it will be helpful for you. Jerry has his own

distinct style of speaking and writing, but I'm sure you will get the major points.

- 13. And then if you want to see samples of the Crossings team actually doing this with OT texts, go once more to the Crossings web site and click on LECTINARY TEXT STUDY. There are already 18 OT text studies there for the Church Year 2008. All of them are presented in the diagnosis/prognosis pattern. I think the best way to learn/understand diagnosis/prognosis method is to study these samples and "see for yourself."*
- 14. Two of the earliest samples of Crossings from OT texts are from our Crossings "Meister" and guru, Bob Bertram himself—now dead for already 5 years. They too are on the Crossings web site. Bob did a Diagnosis/Prognosis study on Isaiah 42. Go to the website and click on the "Works by Bob Bertram." When that list comes up, scroll down to this title (alphabetically coming under "B") "A Baptismal Crossing." The second one is a sermon on Psalm 118. The D's and P's are not identified in the sermon, but they are all there. You find that sermon at this URL: <https://crossings.org/thursday/2005/thur032405.shtml>*

HOW DIAGNOSIS/PROGNOSIS WORKS

Here's how we learned the Crossings method, how we learned to see the pattern of the 6 steps of diagnosis/prognosis. Bob Bertram often would pun about those two Greek words and tell us:

Gnosis in Greek is a visual metaphor. Greeks gained knowledge by "seeing." Hebrews gained knowledge by "hearing." But we can use these Greek words for Biblical study. Dia-gnosis = God's law "seeing through" us like an X-ray, showing the full picture of the sickness. Pro-

gnosis is God's Good News, "God seeing us through" the sickness and bringing us to full good health, rescuing us from our sickness. In the hospital a doctor will make a diagnosis of the patient. He might also make a prognosis statement: "Here is how this sickness will proceed if we do nothing." If however, there is a remedy, some medicine (even radical surgery), he will offer it to the patient in order to bring about a different prognosis for the patient, a "new prognosis" of healing to come from the treatment.

15. The Lutheran Confessions gave us the diagnosis/prognosis pattern. In this way:

a. In the Luth. Confessions, Apology IV in the first paragraphs, Melanchthon gives the Lutheran hermeneutic for reading the Bible. It is to read the Bible with law-and-promise lenses before your eyes. He criticizes the Confutation-critics for reading the Bible with only "Law" lenses. "What God says we must believe. How we must behave. How we are to worship. And so forth. They never find the gospel in the Bible because they are always looking for words of law, requirements for which they will get rewards. No Gospel, no promissio—and therefore they never come to speak about faith!

b. Diagnosis = the law segment of the Lutheran hermeneutic. But LAW understood in a very Pauline fashion: Law exposes our sin, the sickness in our relationship with God. Our malady coram deo. Melanchthon in Apol. 4 says many times: lex semper accusat (the Law always accuses). Diagnosis and Prognosis are "medical" terms, yes. But so is the language of salvation (Heil!) in the Bible. Both the OT and NT terms for salvation are terms for

Heil/health. And the language for sin is also “medical” – UN-heil, “sick unto death.”

- c. So we keep asking a Bible text: What do you tell us of our human sickness? Just as a medical doctor does diagnosis of a sick patient. And we do not stop with just “surface” diagnosis, but keep asking the text to go to the very depth of the sin-sickness problem, always listening for a text’s own language, images, metaphors, word-pictures.
- d. As Lutherans we already know that the Grund-sickness is a “God-problem.” Sick-sinners are at odds with God and the situation is deadly. But we ask the text to tell about this in its own special way. Sample is the very last verse of John chapter three: “The wrath of God remains” on such sin-sick folks.
- e. We have learned that the diagnosis moves from outside diagnosis (behavior) to the inside (unfaith in the heart) to the God-side death-diagnosis expressed, for example, in those final words of John 3.
- f. The diagnosis keeps pushing for this D-3 depth level because it is there that Christ is absolutely necessary and no other helper can help. That is the heart of the Christian Gospel. That is what makes the Christian Gospel different from the gospel of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, etc. That is our Christian claim: the only remedy we know, we have heard about, for D-3 healing is the crucified/risen Jesus.
- g. If you stop your diagnosis at the second level, you don’t need a crucified/risen Messiah to heal it. Some good psychiatrist, counselor, or just wise grandmother can be your helper.

- h. And if you stop just at the first level of diagnosis—our sickness in broken relationships with people and the environment (call it ethics)—there are other helpers who can teach us how to behave better. No need for a crucified/risen Messiah here either.*
- i. Therefore we don't ask a text "What good news do you have?" until we get to D-3—to the God-problem that necessitates Christ. It is THEN that we ask the text: "In the face of this D-3 depth-diagnosis, do you have any Good News for us? Any Good News that will heal the specific diagnosis you have just given us? Good News that will "fit" the Bad News in the very same language, images, metaphors, word-pictures that came with the Bad News?*
- j. As Christians we already know that the only answer there is Christ crucified/risen. But we ask the text to give us its own distinctive words for speaking that to the people.*
- k. After that is spelled out we move back "up" to ask the text: What is your Good News for the D-2 of diagnosis? What Good News comes from the Crucified/Risen Christ to heal the sickness you showed us at the D-2 level? What are the Good News words/metaphors, images, word-pictures to overcome the Bad News language we had in D-2?*
- l. And after that we move back "up" to the first level of the original diagnosis and ask the text: What Good News do you have for this beginning level of our earlier diagnosis? Our life out in the world? Ethics, praxis, our many callings, our conflicts in daily life? The danger here is to slip into legalism and simply say, "Do THIS instead of doing THAT!" The way to avoid that is always to ask: Do I*

see (can I show) how this “good work” grows from the Good-News of level 2, and how that level-two comes from the good news at level 3, Christ crucified/risen?

- m. One thing I often do is to use the image of a tree (as Jesus himself did). When the tree is healthy, the roots (God-side) are OK, the tree trunk and branches are OK (=the human heart), and the tree is bearing fruit that is OK (human actions/life in the world). When the tree is sick, you do not try to repair the fruits, nor the trunk, but you go to the sick “roots” to see if you can heal them. For if you do not heal the “roots,” none of the rest of the tree will be healed at all. So first the roots need to be healed. Therefore first we need to get to the D-3 Diagnosis. THEN we preach Christ to heal the roots. When the roots are healed, then we preach about healing as it moves through the rest of the tree, and finally moves out to the branches to make good fruit.*

Peace and Joy!

Ed

After Armencius had conducted this seminar with those pastors in Medan, he sent me a report concluding with this:

Some pastors asked that I should write a book about “Diagnosis and Prognosis”, because it is “ganz neu” [totally new] for pastors and laypreachers here. I will think about it. What do you think about it?

Here’s what I thought about it.

Armencius, First of all I am overjoyed by your report. Now to

your question. Here's what I think.

A "book" is not a good way to learn a skill, to learn HOW to do something. Diagnosis-prognosis exegesis is such a skill, a "praxis," a "Kunst" [an ability]. You need a Meister—not to TEACH you information as a book might do it, but to SHOW YOU how to do it. That is the way a master painter "teaches" art studentd HOW to do it. By modelling it—just DOING it—in front of their eyes. Then asking them to do it as the Meister watches. Then the Meister showing them how to do it better the next time.

You don't learn how to play Fußball/soccer from a book. You don't learn how to play tennis from a book.

You need to practice, practice, practice— with the "coach" [Meister] watching or playing with you to "show you" how to do it better when you have done it "not so well."

One idea: The next time you are in the USA, bring one or two promising "students" along with you and set aside some days for the current Crossings leaders to conduct seminars with your team.

Second idea: You invite one or two of our Crossings leaders to come to Indonesia and as a team all of you together conduct such seminars with pastors and lay preachers (and even laypeople who are not laypreachers)—as far and as wide as you can.

Now I will ask the same question: What do you think about it?

Schoen Gruss von Haus zu Haus! Dein Ed

Which elicited this on May 9:

Ed,

I've learned of the Crossings Conference October 19-22, 2008. I would like to attend. And I could bring also one Laypreacher along with me. But the problem is budget. It is very expensive actually. I am no longer teaching in our seminary, but I still help some students at the HKBP [=Protestant Christian Batak Church, with 3 million members] at the seminary in Pematangsiantar in their Master Program. Nowadays I am invited by churches/congregations very often. Tomorrow I will conduct a seminar for 40 presbyters, how to prepare good sermons.

Next week I will go to Samosir Island. There is a special seminary for presbyters ecumenically, attended by 175 laypreachers and some pastors, also in connection with sermon preparation. On 6 June a pastor invites me to conduct another seminar, how to explain the text. This will be attended by 150 presbyters. Next July I will go to Jakarta to give a lecture about homiletics, and so on.

There is a good opportunity to teach Diagnosis/Prognosis everywhere.

Thank you for attention. Armencius.

Colleagues: Is that a Macedonian call or what?

“Damn” is Not a Dirty Word

Colleagues,

The text below went to the editor of the St. Louis Post-

Dispatch, our home-town newspaper, last week. It has not yet made the cut to be published. I'm not holding my breath. But one of you out there did see the text and recommended wider distribution. So here it is. And short too. Doubtless the shortest ever ThTh posting. The Post-Dispatch "Letters" department sets strict limits. For today's post to the listserve I overstep those boundaries just a tad.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

letters@post-dispatch.com

April 30, 2008

"Damn" is not a Dirty Word

How awful are Jeremiah Wright's words about God damning America?

In the Bible "damn" is not a dirty word. It's a hospital word, a clinical term, a diagnosis, a grim diagnosis: "patient is terminal." Why? Because God won't be the doctor anymore. That's "damn" in Biblical God-talk. God gives up and says: "Since you won't say 'THY will be done,' I say to you, 'OK, then THY will be done.' I'm out of here."

Those ancient ten plagues afflicting Egypt were God giving up on Egypt—aka damnation. When Egypt protected the Abrahamic newcomers, God blessed Egypt. Big time! But when Egypt started enslaving them, God pulled the protection-plug. "Let nature take its course. I'll not intervene. Your will be done." A damn diagnosis—also big time—glub, glub, glub in the Red Sea.

Everybody's got a list of America's plagues. For starters: Iraq quagmire, health care chaos, crumbling capitalism, gas prices, Wall Street hanky-panky, drug-dealers, drug prices, melting

glaciers, super-bacteria, multi-trillion national debt, and more. Does that signal God abandoning (surely not blessing) America, or what?

Let's get the presidential hopefuls to talk about this. All three claim a faith with Biblical roots. Let's hold their feet to the fire. Is Wright's proposed Biblical diagnosis madness or matter-of-fact, nonsense or truth? And does it matter?

Response so far is: "If you don't like the message, kill the messenger." Sadly, by Obama too. Which, of course, is stupidity, though it happens all the time. Clinton and McCain too patently deny Wright's "damn diagnosis." But denial of a grim diagnosis, without bothering to check it out, is dumb, dumb, dumb. Who wants (another) dumb president? What if the diagnosis is true? What if then the prognosis really is glub, glub, glub?

Most Americans don't know that Abraham Lincoln once diagnosed America in similar fashion, midstream in the Civil War. He claimed that God had abandoned both north and south, that that was the deep root of our killing each other. Wright is talking like Lincoln—and Lincoln was the first ever Republican president! Not dumb, dumb, dumb at all.

[I didn't put this in the original letter to the editor, but I will add it here at the end: Jeremiah Wright for President! Why not another one with a Biblical name? Even better, with a Biblical theology.]

Edward H. Schroeder
St. Louis MO

More Student Theology from that Augsburg Confession Class in Springfield, Illinois.

Colleagues,

Here's more good stuff from students in the "Lutheran Confessions" class that Ron Neustadt and I taught last term.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

To a student's term paper on "Faith" EHS responded:

1. Louise, you have found many of the very best Bible passages about faith and woven them together. Good. However . . .
2. The "big" fight at the time of the Augsburg Confession was "Just what does that little word FAITH mean?"
3. Both sides quoted many Bible passages about "faith"—many of them the great passages you have collected in your term paper.
4. The problem is: You never get around to talking about that difference of opinion in your paper, so I can't tell "which side you are on," in the conflict about the meaning of FAITH. From this term paper I really cannot tell what you learned in our course. Can't tell if you really "got" the central point that Ron and I were trying to show to the class in the Augsburg Confession and Apology.
5. Just quoting the Bible passages isn't enough. You need to tell us what's really inside that word "FAITH."
6. At the time of Augsburg one side said: Faith is saying

“Yes” to all the true-and-right things about God and the world that are revealed in the Bible, and then are taught in the church. The special word was “assent.” That meant saying “yes” to what the Bible and the church teach.

7. The other side said: Faith is trusting the PROMISE that Christ gives us when he says “Son (daughter), be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven. I did it all FOR YOU on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Trust me. Hang your heart on my offer “
8. These two ideas about faith are not the same.
9. Which side are you on? And WHY do you choose that side? Why would anybody want to choose that side? That’s what the Augsburg Confession is all about.
10. So here’s what is still needed to make your term paper a good term paper for our course: Take all those “juicy” Bible passages about faith and “check them out.” Show what the difference is if you say “Faith = saying yes to all the true statements revealed in the Bible” or if you say “faith = hanging your heart on Christ and trusting his PROMISE.”

Kristin Fair March 18, 2008

Final exam – Lutheran Confessions Class. Three Essays Essay #1

Augsburg Confession Article 2–Original Sin

Article Two of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology say that original sin is a fatal flaw of human beings for which the only cure is Jesus’ death and resurrection. We are naturally inclined to do what we want to do and not what God wants us to do. This is called concupiscence. We lack fear of God and trust in God. Our very life—our daily thoughts, words, and deeds—is shaped by this concupiscence. We cannot escape on our own. This relates to the “hub” of the wheel because we are justified by our faith. The good news is we don’t HAVE to overcome our own

concupiscence. We are not the instruments of our own salvation. Therefore, because Jesus died for our salvation, our constant return to our own way of doing things and our constant forgetfulness to trust in God does not have to permanently separate us from God and we do not have to bridge that gap ourselves. If we trust the free gift of salvation from Jesus, then he is the representative for us to God. This article relates to the rim of the wheel, which is the distinction between law and gospel, by taking out the “you gottas” and giving ease of conscience to the people and making use of Christ. A false teaching concerning this article comes in the Confutation. The confutators believed that concupiscence was not a fatal flaw intrinsic of our very inner selves. Instead, they saw concupiscence as merely a loss of control over our inner drives-the “seven deadly sins.” None of the sins were “that bad” on their own, they were only bad when we lost control of them. The cure, then, would be to gain control once again over our inner drives of gluttony, pride, lust, envy, etc. The response to that false teaching, which also goes along with the hub of the wheel, is that if we can “fix” our own problem of original sin-i.e. when we get out of control, simply regain control-then where does the good news of Christ fit in? If we can justify ourselves, what need have we for Christ to have died? In order to ease consciences of those that cannot “fix” their desires and inner wants-that would be everyone-we need to make use of the good news of Christ.

Essay #2

Augsburg Confesion Article Six–New Obedience

In article six of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, the Reformers say that doing good works is a result of good faith, not a requirement for salvation. Good works are the fruit of

justification, not the cause. The reformers wanted to keep good works in the horizontal relationship between us and our neighbors and out of the vertical relationship with God. Because we are justified by faith alone (art. 4), we cannot use good works to “earn” our salvation. If we believe that we can earn our salvation through good works we lose the promise of Jesus. This relates to the hub of the wheel because we are justified by our faith, not our actions, and therefore hear the good news of Christ. We do not have to earn our salvation, which again, we could never do. The distinction between Law and Gospel is evident in this article because the Law says “you gotta” do good works in order to be justified and made right with God. The Gospel says, Jesus died for you and for your sake so that you are justified by your faith and therefore you are free to do good works. A false teaching on this article is again found in the Confutation and is also found in life in the theology of glory ministries. Basically, the confutators said that if good works were not a requirement of salvation then no one would do good works. The theology of glory says that if you do good things for others, God will reward you with glory for yourself. Both of these false teachings can be answered similarly with the distinction between Law and Gospel. Again, the Law (i.e. the Confutators, and the theology of glory) says you must do good works in order to be justified. But who among us could ever do enough good works in our life to make up for the wrongs that we do every day? No one can. Save for Jesus Christ. How can this be “Good News” for the people? It can’t. The Good News, the Gospel, says that Jesus Christ was the only one to live such a life. Then he died and rose again in order to justify us to God. We don’t have to do anything to earn that-not even good works. This eases the consciences of the people AND makes use of Christ. However, because we are justified by our faith and don’t have to earn our salvation, we are free to express our faith through good works for others.

Essay #3

How—if at all—has this class changed your “working theology”?

My “working theology” has not dramatically changed during the course of this class, but has been strengthened by this class. To explain, I will say that in the beginning of my first year in the program I had a lot to learn about the Lutheran faith. I had been a Lutheran my whole life and had never heard-or didn't remember from catechism-a lot of the core principles of the Lutheran faith and of the Augsburg Confession. Not only in this class, but in all the classes I have taken in the past three years, I have learned so much about my faith and have come to truly know that it is the right place for me. When we studied Luther and his life, I related so much to his feelings of inadequacy and the feeling that he could never earn God's love or his own salvation because he could never be “good enough.” Though to many of my peers I am considered a “goody two shoes” and have always strived to do what is right, I knew that it was never enough. I was bothered by that, especially as I attended college and shortly after graduation. I began the SAM classes a couple of years after finishing college. It was a hard time for my faith. Not many people my age share my desire to attend church and participate fully. I knew that I was not always making the choices in my life that God would want me to make. It was in learning about Luther that I heard about his way of reading the bible so that it makes use of Christ and how we are justified by faith alone. That has been a comfort to me countless times in the past few years. During this course, I was reminded constantly of the promises made to me because of my faith in Christ. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology repeat this over and over and over again. As I struggle in life as a young, single teacher looking for a permanent job and longing to be a wife and mother, I have been very frustrated at

times when it seems that God's plan does not match my own plan for my life. (Ah, that concupiscence again!) Since I started the program, I have moved (multiple times), changed churches, changed jobs (multiple times), gained and lost a long term boyfriend, and have even worked two jobs at once. The Good News that I have heard repeatedly during this and all courses of the SAM program has been my guiding force and my saving grace. Regardless of what I am asked or not asked to do after my commissioning, I will forever be grateful of the strength in faith these classes have given me throughout a time in which I felt constantly tested. I always take something from each class that becomes part of my "working theology," so in that sense, my working theology has somewhat changed in this class. I have a few quotes to illustrate. One is actually from Pastor Hoy from our last class and it is "I do not take care of Number One; Number One takes care of me." I have another quote from you, Pastor Ron, from our preaching class. "Are you preaching the Good News of Jesus? Did Jesus Christ need to die in order for you to preach this sermon?" Pastor Schroeder, my quote from you will always be unforgettable-"You don't have to worry about covering your own ass because Christ did it for you." (See-I listen and take notes-maybe a little too well!) In any case, I have felt strengthened and faithfully guided by this class and in learning more about the Lutheran faith. I also have to say, Pastor Ron, that when you said to me that "she gets it..." It was the highest compliment I have ever received. And it helped more than you could know...because I didn't always "get it." But I do now.

Kristin Fair

Term paper: Justification by Faith Alone: What does that mean today?

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were yet still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Romans 5:1-11.

How the above text is interpreted, and even more so how the Bible is interpreted, influences how different groups think salvation is achieved and what the benefits of Christ are to them. Article Four of the Augsburg Confession and the following Apology highlight the way in which the Reformers viewed not only the Bible, but how they viewed justification by faith. The Confutators’ response shows how they read the Bible and how their view of justification is different.

The Augsburg Confession, article four, is very concise. It says only that we cannot earn our salvation through our own merits, works, or satisfactions. We receive forgiveness of sins in God’s grace through Christ by our faith alone. For God will “regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight.”

The Catholic Confutation agrees that we are justified by God's grace, but it also says that merits (our rewards for works done) count. They quote countless Bible passages that seem to support the performing of good works in order to be saved. They believe that salvation does come only through the grace of God. However, they believe that the grace of God allows them to do the works that earn them the merit they need to be made right from God. How then, can the Reformers say that we are saved by faith alone? The Confutators insist that if we are saved through faith alone, then no one will do any good works. If we believe that our sins are forgiven by the grace of God solely by our faith in him, why would any one do any good works?

This brings the Reformers back to the question about how we read the bible. The Apology for Article four begins with several pages about how the Reformers read the Bible and what it means for salvation through Jesus Christ. For Luther and the Reformers, the Bible should be read through the lens of Christ's death on the cross for us. In other words, the Bible needs to be read in a way that articulates the Good News of Jesus Christ. Two questions have to be asked about every confession taken from the Bible, according to the Reformers: 1) does it unburden people's consciences or does it leave them burdened and 2) does it necessitate the death of Christ?

For the Reformers, merit-based salvation can only lead to the despair of the people. The law always condemns and those that do not hear the gospel will only hear the despair of death. "They never believe that they perform anything deserving a merit of condignity, and so they rush headlong into despair unless, beyond the teaching of the law, they hear the gospel concerning the gracious forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of faith." And "...if we had to believe that after our renewal we must become acceptable not by faith on account of Christ but on account of our keeping of the law, our

conscience would never find rest. Instead it would be driven to despair." He then quotes Romans: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."

So say the Reformers then, "For why was it necessary to give Christ for our sins if our merits could make satisfaction for them? Therefore, whenever we speak about justifying faith, we must understand that these three elements belong together: the promise itself; the fact that the promise is free; and the merits of Christ as the payment and atoning sacrifice."

And later, "Scripture calls eternal life a reward, not because it is owed on account of works, but because it compensates for afflictions and works, even though it happens for a completely different reason."

What about today, then? There are all sorts of religions and messages based on the theology of glory— or merit based salvation. If you do this.... then God will.... Televangelists, mega churches, and contemporary "Christian" authors make millions of dollars every year promoting the theology of glory. What can be said to those that believe that the actions they do in this life will determine their eternal destination? Not only that, but also that their current victories and triumphs or downfalls and despairs in life are the result of how "good" they have been in God's eyes. What can be said to them?

Those that follow the law and not the gospel have been around since Jesus' time. When Jesus healed a blind man, the crowd asked who had sinned to make the man blind, him or his parents. During Luther and Melanchthon's time televangelists and mega churches didn't exist, but those that followed the law were around. And the message was the same as today, if you..... then God will.....

What Luther and Melanchthon said then can still be said to the

theology of glory subscribers today. They state in many ways what the theology of glory leads to: "Experience proves that hypocrites who try to keep the law by their own strength cannot accomplish what they set out to achieve." "If indeed the forgiveness of sins depended upon the condition of our works, it would be completely uncertain. For we never do enough works." And: "For it is false that we merit the forgiveness of sins through our works."

Again, they would point to justification "sola fide" (by faith alone). They quoted John 8:36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." "Therefore reason cannot free us from sins and merit forgiveness of sins." "Since we receive the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation on account of Christ by faith alone, faith alone justifies." They choose to hear the Word of the Bible as a promise: because God.... then you...

To be sure then, the followers of the theology of glory would ask, what then, happens to good works? The Reformers said this: "We reject the notion of merit. We do not exclude the Word or sacraments, as the opponents falsely charge... To be sure, love and good works ought to follow faith." "Thus good works ought to follow faith as thanksgiving toward God. Likewise, good works ought to follow faith so that faith is exercised in them, grows, and is shown to others, in order that others may be invited to godliness by our confession."

So what, then, can we say about justification by faith (sola fide)? It uses the benefits of Christ for their intended purpose, gives hope to the people, and hears the Good News of Christ rather than the condemning word of God's law. As a Lutheran Christian, living in this world, and knowing that I can never follow the law to its last letter, I am comforted and I have faith in something I can hold onto. Knowing how many people subscribe to the theology of glory, I think "no wonder

we feel our world is full of despair.”

Marilyn Weingarz

Term Paper: Child of Law – Child of Grace

Preface: Enrolling in the SAM [=Synodically Authorized Minister] course of study was a decision made to discover more about our Lutheran heritage and the Bible. While a lifelong Lutheran, my study of the Bible has been casual, to say the least. While comfortable with my Lutheran background, a little more specific knowledge certainly couldn't hurt. So, while others began the course in preparation for service as preachers and teachers, my objective was personal enlightenment. How could this three-year course of study benefit me? That being said this treatise may not fulfill the requirement of the paper, as it is personal.

Child of Law – Child of Grace

A Tale of Two Sisters

Being the first born of four bestows a great deal of responsibility. You are the eldest sibling and thus bear some responsibility for the actions of the younger. It also conveys a certain amount of authority. Having experienced some of life's trials, it is easy to convey those activities to the others in the flock. This I did with great gusto! Being the first born also requires that you meet your parents' expectations whether conveyed or perceived. Who knows, you may be their only contribution to the world gene pool!

For whichever or whatever reason, I can recall being a “good” child. Did as I was told, tried diligently to meet the expectations of parents and teachers, including those entrusted

with teaching me the Good News. I duly prepared my memorization work for each Sunday morning. Loving to sing it was no task to memorize Sunday School songs and hymns. I especially recall preparing for my confirmation oral test, diligently preparing the answer to the assigned question. I also recall our pastor telling us that should we forget the proper response or have a case of “nerves” to simply recite the ABCs. Remember we’re talking no amplifications systems, a small church with a class of twenty and not an empty pew in the house. No one could hear what you said anyway!

Having completed the prescribed study for confirmation, I could now share in the “mystery” of communion. Most important of which was the placement of the alms box behind the altar into which you were to place a special offering as you went from the bread to the wine side. (Now where was I going to get another nickel?) It wasn’t until the installation of our next pastor, a much younger individual who later became Bishop of the Illinois District, that I finally began to grasp some of the concepts vaguely described previously. What I had garnered through those first 18 years or so was the concept of Law – thou shalt NOT!

A great deal of this Law Concept spilled over into my everyday life. I was very big in keeping my younger sister on the straight and narrow, better her than me. I was always quick to point out that she had colored outside the lines and would grade her accordingly as we played school. It never seemed to bother her as she continued the practice and still does.

During high school I became aware that my Roman Catholic friends had a different method to their worship. They endured not having meat on Friday and going to confession on Saturday afternoon. I didn’t envy the meatless days, but the opportunity to be able to tell someone about your faults and then have the faults erased by praying a few prayers seemed to hold some

merit. Theirs was a “color within the lines faith.” No doubt about what was expected or how to fulfill the requirements. Who knew and, of course, no one mentioned “ex opere operato.” Same for making a sign of the cross and genuflecting! Weren’t they more pious for showing reverence to God? It would be the 1970s and the introduction of the Lutheran Book of Worship that making the sign of the cross became “acceptable” in my neighborhood. Still, no one made mention of the fact that Dr. Martin Luther used this method to remind himself of his baptism in Christ. It didn’t help that the pastor of our congregation at that time while using the sign of the cross to bless the congregation, never “crossed” himself.

While I remember my grandparents and parents visiting with the Pastor for the purpose of confession and announcing for communion, that concept waned in my youth. Just give the ushers your communion card. Many years later I would sit in our church office and dutifully record all who had communed each month. I remember being challenged by an Intern that recording communions should only be done by a pastor, not a lay person. He was a fine Missouri Synod candidate lost in our ALC world. Not much emphasis was placed on the Service of Confession that was recited during worship.

I continued the practice of doing things by the book as a young wife and mother. A friend once called me a “mean mom” because of the requirements and restrictions I placed on our sons. There were chores to be done, homework was to be duly completed, instruments practiced, rooms to be straightened. Even my sons complained that they were the only kids in the class who got their homework graded twice – at home and at school. In spite of these “rigors,” both grew into adulthood, and are contributing members of society. I was certainly very good at the “ya gottas,” especially when it pertained to others.

Since my sister did not live in the same community after marriage, she managed to escape my stringent oversight. She allowed her daughters to bake and ice cookies, never caring that it took hours to clean the kitchen later. She actually encouraged her children to try all kinds of things. The one thing my sibling seemed never able to accomplish was regular church attendance. She obviously was aware of my "excellent" record of attendance, so what was her problem? In spite of her non-attendance, she continued to grow in grace and nurture those whom she encountered along the way as a friend, neighbor and teacher. Her example and encouragement have led many of her students to major achievements in the field of theatre. And I would bet none of them recall her asking them to "color inside the lines."

Years ago in the course of complaining about something that I deemed not right, my sister very quietly said to me, "Not everything is perfect in our lives." Well, maybe not in hers, but And thus, through the years, without trying, my imperfect, caring, nurturing sister showed me the face of grace.

It has taken me a long time to acknowledge that it is not about me. It has taken me several decades of running into the stone wall to realize that no matter what I do there is always someone who does it better. I specifically recall a sermon series "Child of Law, Child of Grace," and thinking it had been written about me and my sister, especially since the Pastor who delivered the sermons was my boss. His comparison of the two individuals and their traits was right on!

Dr. Hoy's course, God-World Connection, using CRUX to help us see more clearly our dependency on the Christ of the cross, was a mind-opening experience. And now Dr. Schroeder's Wheel of the Augsburg Confession has helped to reiterate even more how each

part of our daily lives and the life of our church hinge on the crucified Christ. Where was this emphasis before in my life? Did I neglect to find it on purpose? Have I been really good at not listening to messages from the pulpit? No, I think it is a continuation of the “I can do it myself” syndrome that has been my life.

A good friend once said she wished the Holy Spirit would write her notes about what she is to do with her life. This from someone whose life is filled with study and leading a godly life. (And here again my fallacy as I almost typed “good works.”) I, too, would appreciate daily emails entailing what my actions for the day are to be. Instead I’m left to bumble along using the instructions of the Catechism, the guidelines of the Confessions and my own intellect to find the right path. How do I know the path is the one designated by the Holy Spirit?

Each Article of the Augsburg Confessions is a guidebook for our lives. I like exact instructions and there they are. Even more usable are Dr. Luther’s teachings in the Catechisms and since much of the Small Catechism returns from memory at times unbidden, I just need to pay attention. The old pastor’s penchant for memorization continues to serve me well.

All of the aspects of the Augsburg Confession intertwine to define us as Lutheran: Baptism, forgiveness, faith , justification – all of God’s right hand kingdom, as well as guidelines for our daily lives within our communities and among our neighbors as we work in God’s left hand kingdom. We gain understanding and respect for the views of not just other Lutherans, after all we have been known to choose different flavors of jello, but for the rest of our secular world. God has placed us in this world for various purposes and, while I’m still not always certain what mine might be, the determination

will be made with more understanding and hopefully, acceptance. It will become easier as I let the peace and grace of Jesus the Christ become ever more dominant in my life, when I acknowledge with each breath that everything and, yes, anything, is possible because He has paid our dues (yes, I worked in a bank and think debit/credit); that he has made satisfaction for us. We are his redeemed siblings, children of the Heavenly Father.

Now comes the pleasure of letting faith grow, of finding the Good News of our Savior in every aspect of life. Day by day to love Him more dearly, see Him more clearly and share Him with those whose lives may touch mine and by prayer those whom I will never know or even see.

My sister still colors outside the lines and even encourages her grandchildren to do so. I have made a few inroads into that practice as I allow my grandchildren much more leeway than I did my sons. I think because of age and life experiences, and not formal education, I have learned to be more accepting of people, though not always of practices. Some things will never be right for me, but I will be more aware of "ya gottas" and try not to impose them on others. "Amazing Grace....was blind but now I see....."

Conclusion: And so as you can readily see this is no scholarly study. I hope that I have conveyed in some small measure how dear to me this course of instruction is and why I consider listening to you two teachers more important than writing or discussing papers. I have a huge education deficit and not a lot of time to try to overcome it. I need to cram every minute with all I can. I thank you for offering all you have for my edification.

Reflections on the Roman Papacy

Colleagues,

1. The Bishops of Rome, one just past, one now present, received planet-wide publicity this month. Most all of it free because the passing of one and the coming of the other was a day-after-day media event of “catholic” (= “covering the whole globe”) proportions. But what sort of PR did the Gospel get? The issue of the papacy is always the issue about the Gospel, the promissory Good News of a crucified and risen Jesus. That’s not just a question from a grumpy old Lutheran. It also came from Hans Kueng, perhaps the best-known voice for Roman theology (after the two folks just mentioned) throughout today’s world. But Kueng’s catholicism is not the same as that of the dear departed, and probably not that of the newly elected. For the latter we’ll have to wait and see. Kueng bears scars for saying things like that. At John Paul II’s death Kueng raised the Gospel question about the papacy. In reviewing John Paul’s long long years as Bishop of Rome Kueng said: “New hope will only begin to take root when church officials in Rome and in the episcopacy reorient themselves toward the compass of the Gospel.”
2. That’s always been the Lutheran line about the papacy. Reorient = re-form. And the compass for reform is the Gospel. Is Kueng a “good” Lutheran or a “good” Catholic? Answer: Yes. At least in the 16th century Kueng’s thesis was a core assertion of the “Augsburg” catholics at the

imperial assembly in that town in 1530. The very last article of their confession (Art. 28) rings the changes on re-orienting the papacy along the lines of a “bishop according to the Gospel.” Which in their day—so they documented—it surely was not.

3. Kueng’s lengthy review of the papacy under JP II uses this “Augsburg” yardstick. Since he got burned, some may say his comments are just sour grapes. But I don’t think so. His key term for JP II is “contradictions.” His article [from Spiegel Online / English site] has the title “Crisis in the Catholic Church: The Pope’s Contradictions.” It begins with this brief bio: “Hans Kung is one of today’s leading Catholic theologians. Kueng, a Swiss national living in the southern German city of Tuebingen, has been embroiled in an ongoing feud with church authorities for decades. As a result of his critical inquiries on the papacy, the Vatican withdrew his church authority to teach in 1979. Nevertheless, Kueng, 75, is still a priest and, until his retirement in 1995, taught ecumenical theology at the University of Tübingen. As president of the Global Ethic Foundation, Kueng is also an advisor to the United Nations.”

Some other excerpts:

“Don’t be fooled by the crowds: Millions have left the Catholic Church under Pope John Paul II’s leadership.

“The Catholic church is in dire straits. It will need a diagnosis, an unadorned insider analysis. The therapy will be discussed later. . . . Even for many Catholics, John Paul II at the end of his physical strength, refusing to relinquish his power, is the symbol of a fraudulent church that has calcified and become senile behind its glittering façade.

“The festive mood that prevailed during the Second Vatican

Council (1962 to 1965) has disappeared. Vatican II's outlook of renewal, ecumenical understanding and a general opening of the world now seems overcast and the future gloomy. Many have resigned themselves or even turned away out of frustration from this self-absorbed hierarchy. As a result, many people are confronted with an impossible set of alternatives: 'play the game or leave the church.' New hope will only begin to take root when church officials in Rome and in the episcopacy reorient themselves toward the compass of the Gospel.

"In my view, Karol Wojtyla is not the greatest, but certainly the most contradictory, pope of the 20th century. A pope of many great gifts and many wrong decisions! To summarize his tenure and reduce it to a common denominator: His "foreign policy" demands conversion, reform and dialogue from the rest of the world. But this is sharply contradicted by his "domestic policy," which is oriented toward the restoration of the pre-council status quo, obstructing reform, denying dialogue within the church, and absolute Roman dominance. This inconsistency is evident in many areas. While expressly acknowledging the positive sides of this pontificate, which, incidentally, have received plenty of official emphasis, I would like to focus on the nine most glaring contradictions."

[And then Kueng presents the nine topics. Each with its "yes," and then "yes, but." After presenting the yin-yang, pro and con, contradictions for each item he draws the consequences. I'll only cite mostly the "consequences" here.]

HUMAN RIGHTS:

Consequences: A servile episcopate and intolerable legal conditions. Any pastor, theologian or layperson who enters into a legal dispute with the higher church courts has virtually no prospects of prevailing.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN:

The great worshiper of the Virgin Mary preaches a noble concept

of womanhood, but at the same time forbids women from practicing birth control and bars them from ordination.

Consequences: There is a rift between external conformism and internal autonomy of conscience. This results in bishops who lean towards Rome, alienating themselves from women, as was the case in the dispute surrounding the issue of abortion counseling (in 1999, the Pope ordered German bishops to close counseling centers that issued certificates to women that could later be used to get an abortion). This in turn leads to a growing exodus among those women who have so far remained faithful to the church.

SEXUAL MORALS:

Consequences: Even in traditionally Catholic countries like Ireland, Spain and Portugal, the pope's and the Roman Catholic church's rigorous sexual morals are openly or tacitly rejected.

CELIBACY AMONG PRIESTS:

Consequences: The ranks have been thinned and there is a lack of new blood in the Catholic church. Soon almost two-thirds of parishes, both in German-speaking countries and elsewhere, will be without an ordained pastor and regular celebrations of the Eucharist. It's a deficiency that even the declining influx of priests from other countries (1,400 of Germany's priests are from Poland, India and Africa) and the combining of parishes into "spiritual welfare units," a highly unpopular trend among the faithful, can no longer hide. The number of newly ordained priests in Germany dropped from 366 in 1990 to 161 in 2003, and the average age of active priests today is now above 60.

ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT:

Consequences: Ecumenical understanding was blocked after the council, and relations with the Orthodox and Protestant churches were burdened to an appalling extent. The papacy, like

its predecessors in the 11th and 16th centuries, is proving to be the greatest obstacle to unity among Christian churches in freedom and diversity.

PERSONNEL POLICY:

Consequences: A largely mediocre, ultra-conservative and servile episcopate is possibly the most serious burden of this overly long pontificate. The masses of cheering Catholics at the best-staged Pope manifestations should not deceive: Millions have left the church under this pontificate or they have withdrawn from religious life in opposition.

CLERICALISM

Consequences: Rome's clericalist policy merely strengthens the position of dogmatic anti-clericalists and fundamentalist atheists. It also creates suspicion among believers that religion could be being misused for political ends.

NEW BLOOD IN THE CHURCH:

Consequences: Young people from church groups and congregations (with the exception of altar servers), and especially the non-organized "average Catholics," usually stay away from major youth get-togethers. Catholic youth organizations at odds with the Vatican are disciplined and starved when local bishops, at Rome's behest, withhold their funding. The growing role of the archconservative and non-transparent Opus Dei movement in many institutions has created a climate of uncertainty and suspicion. Once-critical bishops have cozied up to Opus Dei, while laypeople who were once involved in the church have withdrawn in resignation.

SINS OF THE PAST:

Consequences: The half-hearted papal confession remained without consequences, producing neither reversals nor action, only words.

Kueng concludes:

“For the Catholic church, this pontificate, despite its positive aspects, has on the whole proven to be a great disappointment and, ultimately, a disaster. As a result of his contradictions, this pope has deeply polarized the church, alienated it from countless people and plunged it into an epochal crisis – a structural crisis that, after a quarter century, is now revealing fatal deficits in terms of development and a tremendous need for reform.

“Contrary to all intentions conveyed in the Second Vatican Council, the medieval Roman system, a power apparatus with totalitarian features, was restored through clever and ruthless personnel and academic policies. Bishops were brought into line, pastors overloaded, theologians muzzled, the laity deprived of their rights, women discriminated against, national synods and churchgoers’ requests ignored, along with sex scandals, prohibitions on discussion, liturgical spoon-feeding, a ban on sermons by lay theologians, incitement to denunciation, prevention of Holy Communion – “the world” can hardly be blamed for all of this!!

“If the next pope were to continue the policies of this pontificate, he would only reinforce an enormous backup of problems and turn the Catholic church’s current structural crisis into a hopeless situation. Instead, a new pope must decide in favor of a change in course and inspire the church to embark on new paths – in the spirit of John XXIII and in keeping with the impetus for reform brought about by the Second Vatican Council.”

Comment:

These concluding words are right out of Augsburg, Article 28.

"The Catholic church's current structural crisis . . . the medieval Roman system, a power apparatus with totalitarian features was restored." Aye, there's the rub. At least so the Augsburg catholics thought. It was not the personal style, the idiosyncratic predilections, or even the morality of individual popes that riled the 16th century reformers. It was the "system," the "church's current structure," the papacy itself (not the popes), that was not-to use Kueng's terms- "oriented toward the compass of the Gospel."

In Lutheran lingo it was "left-hand" structures and rubrics imposed upon the "right-hand" of the Body of Christ, specifically its fundamental life-line of promoting the promise of the forgiveness of sins. Read Augsburg Confession (and Apology) 28 for more details on the clear contradiction of using coercion to get anything done (right) in the church of Christ..

Or go to Melanchthon's "Treatise on Power and Primacy of the Pope," a kind of addendum to the Smalcald Articles in the Lutheran confessions. Here Melanchthon challenges "from the gospel" three structural elements of the papacy: "that the bishop of Rome is by divine right superior to all bishops and pastors; that by divine right he possesses 'both swords,' that of coercion and that of forgiveness; and that it is necessary for salvation to believe these things [for which] reasons the bishop of Rome calls himself the vicar of Christ on earth."

Or to Luther's dedicatory letter to Pope Leo X of his day, the opening paragraphs of his famous monograph on "Christian Freedom." Here Luther not only presents the essay as a gift to Leo, but has the chutzpah to give him counsel on how to survive in the midst of a papal structure that is anti-Gospel from the git-go. Is it tongue-in-cheek, or is he serious? He claims he's only following in the train of Bernard of Claervaux who gave similar counsel to the pope of his day.

Coming up to the twentieth century. In the early 1950s Jaroslav Pelikan told us students at Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) something like this: "With the decree on papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council (1869-70), the Roman Catholic Church became a sect. From that point onward there was no structural channel available within the Roman church to call the Bishop of Rome to account."

A system with finally but one person at the top and no one "over" him (or even alongside, in the ancient tradition of "collegiality" among bishops) to challenge his words and actions by "the compass of the Gospel," is a system grounded in an "other" Gospel. It is not the pattern proposed by the church's Lord. That was the blunt charge of the Lutheran Reformers.

The very word "hierarchy" carries the virus of heresy. In hierarchy the "rule" (-archy) is in the hands of the "priest" (hieros). Now you might say, well, someone has to be in charge. Maybe so. But then the question comes: HOW does the one in charge exercise the "archy"? In Matthew 20:20-28 Jesus distinguishes between two very different archies for the life of his community. Would that those verses had been some "voice over" throughout the words and pictures coming from Rome these past weeks. Better still "voice under" if we follow the rubrics of Matt. 20.

Here Jesus gives the specs for the exercise of "archy" in HIS church. It is "archy compassed by the Gospel." He contrasts it with other "archies"—including such as claim to "know what is good for you." Gospel "archy" never ever is "authority over," but always "authority under." That sounds like an oxymoron. But only so to such as have never gotten a good dose of the upside-down "archy" of the crucified and risen Christ. In Jesus' own day there were throngs who didn't get it. Throughout the church's two millennia history there have been throngs more. And

not just in Rome. Today's denominational structures across the ecumenical spectrum (Lutherans included) are plagued by the virus of hier-archy.

While watching all the ceremony—all that red fabric—coming from Rome these days, it would have been edifying to have had Mel Gibson's recent "Movie in Red" running in split-screen alongside. Granted, that gory Jesus is a "Gospel according to Gibson." [We posted three ThTh reviews of it last year when the film appeared. If interested, check the Crossings website <www.crossing.org>] Even so, the claim of the principals in the extravaganza we've just witnessed from Rome is that there is a direct connection between the two. More than just "connection," but that the one sitting in the cathedra in St. Peter's basilica is the living representative, the vicar, of the Protagonist of Gibson's Gospel.

Except for all that red—where was the connection?

To make such connection requires us to talk about Gospel. So Kueng. So Jesus. What kind of Gospel did all that hoopla proclaim? Was there any other message than this: "the medieval Roman system, a power apparatus with totalitarian features?" If there were signals "oriented toward the compass of the Gospel," I missed them.

Once more, structures in non-Roman churches nowadays don't seem much different either. And there are folks in these communions too who also say: "New hope will only begin to take root when church officials in [our church too] and in the episcopacy reorient themselves toward the compass of the Gospel."

Benedict XVI is a German. He can read Luther (and the Lutheran Confessions) in his mother tongue! Imagine what might happen if he discovered that compass! Even we Lutherans would be blessed [=benedictus] from such a Roman Reverse Reformation.

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

Mosaic Law: Two Views Both Claiming to be Lutheran

Colleagues,

First off—a long Segue to Sinai—“too long.”

Last week’s post (ThTh 514) presented the two “Why Jesus?” articles I’d sent to our ELCA national magazine together with the comments and correctives that came back to me from the editor responsible for issues of “People and Faith” at The LUTHERAN. I wondered: was that editor’s message already a letter of rejection? But an e-mail a few days ago made that perfectly clear—“Perhaps this magazine isn’t the best medium for your message.” The reasons given were not cheering. So that’s the end of my affair with The LUTHERAN. Well, for now it is,

FYI, Here’s the original proposal that got this all started:

To the Editor, The LUTHERAN,
Here’s an offer. A Series on OUR FAITH. A 12-segment proposal. A “second opinion” to the current series appearing under that caption.

Title: Real Help from Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms for Today

1. How to talk about God.
2. Adam, Eve and All of Us—Our Chronic God-problem
3. Why Jesus? Why Jesus at all?
4. Can Anyone Ever ALWAYS Be Right?
5. Why is “Faith” Such a Big Deal?
6. What is This Thing Called “Ministry”? [Or, How Does Jesus Get From First Century Galilee to our 21st Century World?]
7. What’s Christian About Christian Ethics?
8. Creation, Darwin, Intelligent Design—Luther’s Counsel for How We Might Cope.
9. Just how Spooky is the Holy Spirit?
10. “One, holy, catholic and apostolic church.” What does this mean?
11. Providence or Promise? It Makes a Difference Where you Start for Christian Prayer.
12. How Many Sacraments are There? How Best to Use Them. If there is some (apocalyptic) reason for a 13th issue, then this coda:
13. Where Will it All End—a Bang, a Whimper or Something Else?

The “People and Faith” area-editor responded and asked for a sample of what I had in mind with the “Why Jesus?” title. I sent in two versions—how St. Paul answers the question, how Luther does. Neither made the cut.

My month-after-month drumbeat—on what OUR FAITH is and what it isn’t—has made me a pest at the magazine office. [You should hear the titles that have been bestowed on me. On second thought, you should NOT hear them. You might agree!] But, truth to tell, I got snookered into this by Steve Hitchcock out in California. Before I’d ever gotten around to reading the January issue of The LUTHERAN, where the first column of the OUR FAITH series began, Steve tore out that OUR FAITH page of the January issue and snail-mailed it to me with this paste-on comment: “Do

they do this on purpose just to give you a heart attack?"

So I read it. Didn't have a coronary, but did what I'd learned to do from the days of the Wars of Missouri. When an "other gospel" surfaces—especially under the Lutheran label—say something. Not yet having un-learned that lesson—probably never will, it's deeply imprinted—I sent a letter to the editor proposing what might be a more Lutheran statement confessing OUR FAITH on that first topic: "Jesus' Justice Agenda." After subsequent issues of that column—January to April—I've done it again. One of those "op ed" proposals did get onto the LUTHERAN's web page, and a print-page notice told readers where to find it. It was deemed too long for print-page presentation in the magazine as an Op Ed piece. One person did tell me that he read it on the web. Maybe there were more.

To clear the desk, now that I've gotten my "Dear John" letter, I'll paste here below the last "second opinion" submitted to the editor, an "op ed" to the OUR FAITH column in the April 2008 issue on "Mosaic Law." I don't expect it to show up in the May issue. It too is "too long." Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Finally: Mosaic Law: Two Views Both Claiming to be Lutheran

To the Editor, The LUTHERAN

To say it point-blank:

This month's column on "Mosaic Law" presents the basic substance of the theology of the Pontifical Confutation of 1530. That official Roman document refuted the Augsburg Confession, anathematized its core substance on law and gospel—and on justice and righteousness. Lutherans do not promote Confutation theology. Martin Luther could never have said anything like this

column says about Mosaic Law. Neither did St. Paul. Neither did Jesus.

Sure, the writer's prose is winsome, reasonable, compelling. So were the words of the Roman Catholic Confutation. That's why lots and lots of folks said "no, thanks" to the Augsburgers in the 16th century. Yes, the Confutation's theology did speak to the hearts of people, did draw a vast following. But its message was an "other" Gospel. That's what the Augsburgers confessed. So which of the two, the Augsburgers or the Confutators, should be mentoring us about OUR FAITH in The LUTHERAN? That's surely a no-brainer.

Here are some thoughts—sentence-for-sentence—on the "Mosaic Law" article:

First sentence from this month's column: Through learning righteousness and justice, God's people become an example

[Comment. The Biblical track record of God's ancient people is that they did NOT learn righteousness and justice—neither "zedekah," nor "mishpat" (two different, not synonymous, Hebrew terms)—and thus they did NOT become an example to any of the other nations. That, said the prophets, is why God sent them into captivity. Both northern and southern kingdoms. They failed their God-given assignment—both in learning and in being an example. Miserably.]

Every society develops laws and traditions that seek to provide and enforce whatever is seen to be in its best interests.

[Biblically viewed, God is the one who gives societies their operational structures—all of them under the rubric "law"—in order to preserve human life in the now-fallen world, and to see to it that a modicum of equity prevails. These structures come with agencies of coercion to enforce both God's "law of

preservation” and God’s “law of equity justice,” aka “law of retribution”—in nickel words that last one is: “you get what you deserve.” Such preservation/retribution, of course, IS in the society’s best interest. But these societal structures of “law” are always “emergency measures” to prevent full-scale chaos. And the agents managing these structures are always sinners. No non-sinner agents are available. So even these God-authorized agents of preservation/retribution fail. Their own un-cured “unrighteousness” inevitably mucks things up. No society ever has lasted. They all pass away. Societies too get their “just deserts.” Is that why the USA is on the verge of “passing away?” But I digress.]

The society that formed from those who followed Moses out of Egypt on a journey to a promised land is no exception. They developed laws, established traditions and set norms for social boundaries and relationships in ways that told the story of who they were and whose they were.

[The society that God brought out of Egypt was no exception. The structures of their society were the God-given specs for their own existence in the fallen world as fallen children of Adam and Eve. A modicum of preservation/retributive justice prevailed. Sometimes pretty good, sometimes awful. But it wasn’t good enough for them to survive either. In the words of the OT prophets, Israelite society too got its “just deserts”—Assyrian and Babylonian captivity—and in Jesus’ day Roman occupation. Remember, all of these “oppressors” —wicked though they were—were God’s agents for dealing out “just deserts” to his own recalcitrant chosen folks.]

They saw themselves as a chosen people-brought from bondage to freedom by a mighty God with whom they already were in covenant relationship through Abraham and Sarah. This God was seasoning them to be a blessing to all nations.

[Israel is called a “chosen people.” What does that mean? They had a special gift from God besides that “standard stuff” that all societies of their day possessed, those God-given structures of preservation/equity justice. Israel had an additional “covenant,” an additional “deal” from the very same God who dealt out the other “deal,” the preservation/retribution stuff.

The radical quality of this “other deal” surfaces in the OT in God’s very different covenant “deal” with Abraham and David. It’s a “mercy” covenant [“chesedh” in Hebrew], qualitatively different from God’s Exodus “deal” culminating with Moses at Sinai. At the very center these two “deals” are clean contrary. For example, the Sinai covenant has no forgiveness for commandment-breakers. It’s simply not there. In the Sinai contract you get your just deserts. Fairness, but no forgiveness. Whereas in the Abraham/David covenant forgiveness [chesedh = mercy for sinners] is at the center of the deal. Sinners do NOT get their “just deserts.” Instead of “fairness” they get “forgiveness.” Big, big difference.

These two covenants are so different that in NT times St. Paul (and Jesus too) will refer back to them in the OT as the “distinction between God’s law and God’s promise.” Two different covenants. So different that both Jesus (esp. in John’s gospel) and Paul (everywhere in his letters) will call it the difference between slavery and freedom, between death and life.

Israel had no “special stuff” to bless the nations with its preservation/retribution structures. The prophets’ constant drumbeat is “We blew it! We blew it!” as far as righteous and equitable behavior goes in Israelite society, century after century. Some of the other nations had patently better laws of society, and a better track-record. But Israel’s “special stuff” was that Abraham/David special stuff. THAT was the blessing—first of all for them!—and then on assignment for them

to spread it around to “the nations.” Sure, they failed to do that. Not until Jesus came along did that “mercy” covenant get to the nations. It took a crucified/risen Messiah to fulfill the assignment made way back there to Abraham to be a “blessing to the nations.”]

An important spice in that seasoning was learning to treat one another with righteousness and justice.

[Not so. The “spice” was the Abraham/David covenant stuff of “mercy.” That is the qualitatively different sort of “righteousness and justice” that God bestowed on this chosen people. The nations already had been gifted from God with the “law’s” kind of righteousness/justice. Israel didn’t have anything special to teach the nations on this score. Especially given their own track record. Sometimes the nations were way ahead of Israel in how to have a civil society. ‘Course, none of them did it perfectly either. And eventually they all passed away too. None of them passed God’s final examination. Israel included.]

Having learned to do it among themselves from laws given to them by God, the personification of righteousness and justice, it was hoped they could be an example to others.

[Not really. They never did learn. That is the message of every one of the OT prophets. Also the message of Jesus in every one of the four gospels. Universal Biblical verdict is: They failed. Where are the data that say they DID learn it? I know of none in the Bible. They failed both the preservation/equity-justice agenda and the “spread God’s mercy around” agenda. Hope, shmope!]

The source of this seasoning is found in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah, particularly Exodus through Deuteronomy-sometimes referred to as the Mosaic law.

[The Mosaic law is diagnostic of their malady. Not therapeutic at all. If that law is “seasoning,” then it is salt and pepper in the wounds. That’s what the prophets said, “the law shows us our sin.” Cf. the mantra in the Lutheran confessions, “lex semper accusat” = the law is always our accuser. That’s also what Jesus said, that’s what the writers of the NT say. When Paul says: “If the law could have brought sinners back to life, then Jesus died for no purpose at all,” he is saying (as he does explicitly) this “seasoning” is a “seasoning of death.” The Lutheran Reformation was a knock-down drag-out fight on this very point. What’s God doing in his law? What’s God doing in the crucified and risen Christ?

This page on “Mosaic Law” is arguing in favor of the other side in the Reformation battle. I suppose the writer doesn’t know that. Even so, this page should never have appeared in THE Lutheran—and even more gosh-awful, it should never be trotted out as “Our Faith.”]

The Mosaic law, which includes the Ten Commandments, deals with many aspects of life together for God’s chosen community, including social responsibilities toward others. In Exodus 22-23, there are provisions for restitution when people lose their property and admonitions to not mistreat orphans and widows. The Hebrews were commanded to treat each other with justice and mercy, to not deceive one another in personal or business matters.

[The Mosaic Law contains a total of 613 rules and regulations according to Jewish scholars. Its core is the 10 commandments from Sinai. The remaining 603 are in a sense “variations” on the the Basic Ten. These Ten –like all commandments—are do’s and don’t’s, but of a particular kind. Not primarily “behavioral,” they are rather all “relational.” Commandments 1,2,3 speak to my relation to God, the “interface” between me and God.

Commandments 4 through 10 speak to my relations with people and the world, my "interface" with the world around me. The linkage between the two sets is "cause and effect." If my God-interface is "right," that will "cause" my neighbor-interface to be "right" also. If the neighbor "interface" is "un-right(eous)," the "cause" of that fracture with the neighbor is a fracture at the God-interface. According to the commandments you can never "fix" problems of "neighbor-interface" (bad ethics) unless you first "fix" the problem at the God-interface (bad faith).

This is rock-bottom foundation stuff for Lutheran ethics—both personal ethics and social ethics. It was at the center of the conflict at the time of the Lutheran Reformation.]

In Leviticus 19 the people are encouraged to leave part of their harvest for the poor and for the stranger, as well as commanded to treat the stranger as one who was born among them. Deuteronomy 15 goes so far as to say there "should" be no poor among the chosen people if the law is faithfully obeyed. Deuteronomy 24:22 captures a God-given motivation for treating everyone with justice, particularly the most vulnerable of society: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this."

[The motivation for "doing good to the neighbor" is never a hope of reward, or fright about what will happen if I "break" some commandment. The motivation is always "faith," my "right" (=righteous) relationship on the God-interface. It is full-scale trust in God's promises to me that motivates (= "moves") me to be God's sort of person, yes an "image of God" in my daily life. This is not always clear in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, sometimes even contradicted. For Christians it becomes "perfectly clear" in Christ. When we trust Christ, he becomes our mentor for ethics. He replaces Moses. Good as Moses was and is, Christ is "something greater than Moses"—not only for the me-and-God-

interface, but also for my interface with people and the world.]

Worship and reverence of God were also addressed in the Mosaic law. Starting with the first five of the Ten Commandments, God let the people know that the God of creation, the God of the ancestors, the God of justice, is the same God who brought them out of slavery in Egypt and is now their God.

[Dunno where the author got that “first five” reference. Faith in God is the topic in the first three commandments—as Lutherans number the Basic Ten—and love toward the neighbor for the last seven. These are the two rock-bottom interfaces of every human being throughout human history. As our Confessions say, “Faith itself is the highest worship of God.” There is no better way to give God glory than to trust his promises. God did indeed bring Israel out of slavery in Egypt, but even that great rescue didn’t “fix” their un-right God-relationship. Nor did Sinai. The rest of the OT is full of episode after episode of their un-faith. They kept on NOT trusting God’s promise. And God sent them into captivity. Not until Jesus comes, so the Christian Gospel claims, did that numero-uno problem get solved. You can’t talk about “Christian” righteousness and justice merely on the basis of the OT. You have got to bring Christ into the picture—at the very center of the discussion. Otherwise you are promoting Judaism, but not Christian faith and life.]

The Mosaic law details how the worship and praise of this high and holy God is to be conducted. There are elaborate rituals of sacrifice, thanksgiving, atonement, blessing, purification and consecration. What is eaten, what is worn, what is holy and unholy, and even family and social obligations all were tied to worship and reverence of God.

[Already covered in previous paragraph.]

The covenant people were also encouraged through the Mosaic law

to have a right relationship with the land they had been given. The land was always to be considered holy and not to be defiled. The soil was to be properly cared for and even given a sabbath so it would continue to produce to its potential. The people were to be righteously related to the land of promise as they were to be righteously related to one another.

[Lutheran understanding of the OT claims that Jesus-in-the-gospels and Paul(and others)-in-the-epistles are the right interpreters for the OT. Therefore you need to talk about TWO, not just ONE, covenant in the OT when you talk about "covenant people." That is Paul's constant drumbeat throughout his epistles. It is also Jesus' constant critique of his critics, cresting in the Gospel according to John. The two covenants are very different. One covenant [Abraham, David] has "mercy for sinners"—as mentioned earlier—and one covenant [Moses/Sinai] has no mercy (forgiveness), but just deserts for sinners. The word "promise" appears in both covenants, but the promises are different. E.g., the "promise of land" was conditional on Israel's obeying the commandments. Which they did not do. So they lost the land. There is no "land" in the mercy-covenant promise. God's gift of mercy and forgiveness heals and seals the fracture at the God-interface, no matter what land your feet are planted on.

There is no place for "land" in the covenant of God's mercy and sinners trusting that mercy. So Jesus commissions his apostles to go to the "ends of the earth." It's not "bring them all back here to this 'holy' land," but get Jesus' own "Holy-ing" Spirit into folks in every land where it isn't yet. No place on the planet is special any longer. The crucified and risen Messiah is the place where mercy-holiness has landed. Jesus replaces any notion of the Holy Land with himself. If there is to be any talk of land, then the "land" Christians are seeking is still up ahead (Hebrews 11), "a better country, a heavenly one." None of

us has been there yet. But we trust Jesus to get us there.]

Both people and land were part of God's covenant promise to Abraham, which was constantly passed down to his descendants. It was a promise that included immeasurably abundant blessings for both people and land-if only the people were faithful to their part of the covenant.

["If only the people were faithful" Ay, there's the rub. "If ONLY the people were not sinners. . . . then they would have been faithful." But they were sinners. So the Sinai/Moses covenant (with no forgiveness for sinners) is not Good News at all for Israel. The only hope for sinners in the OT is the Abraham/David covenants with forgiveness for sinners and "righteousness" freely offered for "only" trusting God the promisor. That "only" back in God's promise to Abraham is the same "faith alone, faith only" in Lutheran Reformation theology. With this very different sort of covenant [promise-and-faith]-so very different from Moses/Sinai-come very different "blessings." Land, especially, is no big deal any longer.]

The laws that governed them in all aspects of their life were to be a constant reminder that they were to be righteous in their relationship with God, justice-minded in their relationship with one another and with the stranger, and ecologically astute in their relationship with the land.

["The laws that governed them in all aspects of their life" proved to be tyranny. Jesus in the gospels and the apostles in the epistles claim that the "constant reminder" coming from God's law was just one message: "You're not measuring up. You are a law-breaker. You've blown your relationship with God and there is hell to pay. You need help, big help." And where is that help? "Our help is in the name of the LORD-not in your 'trying harder' to keep the law-and in his suffering servant

(Isaiah 53) whose name is Jesus.” Be very careful about this “justice-minded” business. If God were justice-minded—and only justice-minded—with sinners, they would all be cinders. Sinners need a mercy-minded God, or else they are toast. And being “mercy-minded” to the neighbor—yes, even our enemies—is the “new commandment” of Jesus. There never was such a commandment in the law coming from Moses.]

These are important ways in which they were to share blessings among themselves—and also to be a blessing to others.

[Israel’s calling to be a blessing is NOT linked to the Moses/Sinai covenant. They had just ONE blessing to share with the world. It is their Abraham/David covenant—all about God’s mercy and forgiveness of sinners. But they blew that covenant too. It took Jesus to “fulfill” that covenant and to bring that “blessing” into a world where it hadn’t been concretely available before. It’s there like a promissory note in God’s covenant-making with Abraham/David. This promise offers God’s commitment in the future. But before the coming of Christ it is not “fulfilled,” not concretely here “down-on-the-ground.” Yes, that mercy was “available” to OT people, but available only “in hope,” as they trusted the Abraham/David mercy-promise. In Jesus the hoped-for happened, “dwelt among us,” as John’s gospel puts it. God’s “promise-fulfilled” is the NT way of speaking of Jesus forgiving sinners. Spreading that “promise-fulfilled” around the world is the blessing-business assigned to Christ’s people “until he comes again.”]

Why Jesus? Still a Problem in our ELCA

Colleagues,

Two items from “Higgins Road,” (the folksy name for the ELCA national headquarters @ 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago 60631), come in under that “Why Jesus?” rubric this week. One is a news release remembering the bloody business exactly one year ago at Virginia Tech Institute. That news release also recalls what our ELCA campus pastor at VTI did—and did not—proclaim as he spoke to a world audience immediately thereafter, and it reports on what has happened since then in campus ministry there.

Significant—both then and now—is the Christ-less-ness of all the prose.

You may remember that ThTh postings a year ago—eventually five of them—were “stuck” on how to speak Christ to the VTI apocalypse. Some of you even offered “Christ-full” re-writes of the “Christ-less” homily offered by our ELCA campus pastor. *[If interested, GO to the Crossings website <www.crossings.org> and click on Thursday Theology 2007. It begins with the April 19 posting—and then four of the next six thereafter.]*

Second item for the “Why Jesus?” topic is some correspondence I’ve had with editorial people of THE LUTHERAN, the ELCA’s official monthly journal. I’ve been complaining to them almost every month since a series started running in THE LUTHERAN—a series called OUR FAITH—that it was not proclaiming “our” LUTHERAN faith at all, namely, the one articulated in the Lutheran Confessions. Despite my “compelling” arguments, the series continues. So I stopped gritching and “re-wrote” the OUR

FAITH text in the April issue and sent it to the editor. Couple days later I got “really feisty” (for the first time, of course!) and proposed an entire 12-month series as an Op Ed to the series currently running.

A second-echelon editor responded: “Send us a sample of what you have in mind, preferably on one title you propose in the series: ‘Why Jesus?’” So I did. In two versions—as St. Paul answered the question, as Martin Luther answered the question. And I did get a response, but I can’t tell if they are really interested or not.

So Herewith the documents on both of these items from the ELCA “head-shed” on the “Why Jesus?” question. First comes the ELCA press release and (couldn’t resist) some comments bracketed into that text. Then (with no comment) the two “Why Jesus?” pilot-columns and the response that came back from Higgins Road.

ELCA NEWS SERVICE

April 10, 2008

Lutherans Prepare for First Anniversary of Virginia Tech Shooting

CHICAGO (ELCA) – The Lutheran Student Movement at Virginia Tech is providing opportunities for growth while bracing for the media attention of the first anniversary of the worst campus shooting in U.S. history.

On April 16, 2007, a lone gunman killed 32 faculty and students at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Va., before killing himself.

The Rev. William H. King said the greatest anxiety he hears

among students as the first anniversary of the shooting approaches is the media attention. According to King, the feeling on campus is "Here come the (news) trucks again."

King serves as one of the campus pastors at Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) located across the street from the Virginia Tech campus.

Mark Meyer, 22, a third-year junior majoring in mechanical engineering, said the campus became a media headquarters overnight. "Individually, we talked to several reporters, but after a few days that became intrusive," said Meyer. He noted that "the media coverage was not exactly matching what I was experiencing."

For many students, fresh media attention means revisiting traumatic memories.

Virginia Tech student Betsy Potter, 22, said that life on campus immediately after the shooting felt like "a fishbowl" with all of the media. "There'd be people crying at memorials and others taking pictures of them," said Potter.

Potter added that Virginia Tech students felt supported by Lutheran Student Movement (LSM) chapters nationwide. "It was amazing how many other LSM (groups) sent notes from all over the country," she said.

When students returned for classes in the fall, they were in very different places, said the Rev. Joanna Stallings, campus pastor, Luther Memorial. Many students were "through with (the shooting) and didn't want to hear another word about it," she said.

"The most important thing we did as a community was worship,"

said Stallings. Students gather weekly on Tuesday evenings for a meal and worship at the student center, and participate in Luther Memorial's Sunday services.

King said, "When push came to shove, it was the worship that provided those words of comfort – the needful, healing things that people were yearning for. There were no answers that were going to explain this."

Meyer said that the campus ministry's programs and spiritual aspects drew him in. "The big reason I kept coming back was that I got to know people and we became friends," he said.

[ES: I wonder if "What a Friend we have in Jesus" was one of those people, one of those friends.]

In addition to attending to spiritual needs of LSM members and the local community, the tragedy provided an unexpected opportunity for public ministry on a national level.

The day after the shooting, King was asked to offer words from the Christian tradition to comfort a diverse community at the Virginia Tech Convocation, which included speeches by Virginia Tech faculty member Nikki Giovanni and U.S. President George W. Bush.

[ES: I don't remember. Did either of them name THE name?]

"I took a lot of heat for not mentioning Jesus in that convocation," said King of the nationally broadcast event. King felt it was important to provide pastoral care for the entire university community at that event, rather than make a confessional statement.

[ES. Yes "naming THE name" is indeed making a confession. It's what Jesus calls for from every disciple. Take a look at Mark 8:38, and draw your own conclusions. How about Romans 1:16, St.

Paul's lead-in to THE cornerstone text (v.17) of the Lutheran Reformation? How can ordained pastors claim an exemption? "Providing pastoral care" and not naming THE care-giver amounts to "providing care" from some OTHER care-giver. How can that possibly be "offering words from the Christian tradition to comfort a diverse community?" Is there any other source for coping with death "in the Christian tradition" than the Easter Jesus? How can you do that without telling folks who that is? And of course, NOT just name-dropping, but telling them why that Easter Jesus is Good News—right now in the midst of all the blood and bodies?]

That evening, King and three other pastors led a joint worship service for members of the Virginia Tech LSM and two ELCA congregations in Blacksburg, Luther Memorial and St. Michael Lutheran Church. "That was the place where we brought the Word into reality, saying, 'This is horrible, but the Psalmist has dealt with this in a lament. This is mysterious, but Scripture does speak to this situation of grief,'" King recounted.

[In "the Christian tradition" THE Word has a personal name. This Word never can be "brought into reality" namelessly. That Word-with-a-personal-name is—so Christians claim—God's own last word for "speaking to situations of grief." He fulfills cry of every Psalmist's lament. Psalmist-laments that don't get connected to Christ are "un-filled-full" laments. They may be good Jewish laments, but they are empty of Christ's victory. "In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell." You are not speaking from "the Christian tradition" when you do not "make a confessional statement" about Christ in the face of death.]

In the months afterward, King said he revisited the theology of the cross, a paradox from Martin Luther's teachings that states that God is revealed and God is also hidden in times of suffering. "Now I'm beginning to get a sense of what it's all

about. In the midst of this, God is faithful, but there are also lots of loose ends that flop around."

[If you still don't "get the sense" why naming THE name is the cornerstone of "the Christian tradition," you have NOT gotten "the sense" of Luther's theology of the cross. Not only the sense, you haven't gotten a clue. WHOSE cross is this cross-theology talking about? Yes, there are "lots of loose ends flopping around." But they are NOT in Luther's theology of the cross.]

"I would never ever say that God did this to Virginia Tech," said King, but, through the experience of pain and suffering at Virginia Tech, the community has been opened to other people's around the world.

[Why did Jesus, however, say that God, not the Roman army, would some day level Jerusalem? And that was a big massacre. Jesus was committed to monotheism. So is "the Christian tradition." There is no space in monotheism for some second (almost equal) deity to be at work—an evil god, a darkness-deity, doing the destructive stuff. Manichaeism—and the Canaanite religions showing up in the OT—manages the horrendous in history by positing a second deity. Not so the Christian tradition. Already in the OT, Canaanite-style di-theism is heresy. "See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand." Deuteronomy 32:39.]

King compared the task to preaching at a funeral: "The gospel matters in that moment or it doesn't matter at all. There's a bracing clarity in that moment."

[Would that there were "bracing clarity" about "Gospel matters" in this press release one year later. Apart from the name of Jesus the gospel does not matter. Nor is it Gospel. Not Good

News at all.]

"I sense that our students do not want their Virginia Tech experience to be dominated by this particular event. People acknowledge the loss. They're not in denial. They just don't want to be defined by that event," said King.

[I won't even touch who is in denial and who is being denied. How about "defining events?" Too bad God doesn't give us the choice to select the events that will define our lives. On second thought, that is not bad at all. Au contraire. For wasn't that the primal temptation in Eden—and ever since—to choose for ourselves what will be the "defining events" of our lives. "Not my will, but thine be done," is Jesus' proposed alternative to the Eden event. Thus crucifixion became the defining event of his life. Christians are those who confess those same seven words of Jesus, and thereby follow in his train.]

"Naming the Pain, Speaking of Hope: Considerations for Religious Address in Time of Crisis" by the Rev. William H. King, published in the May 2007 issue of Journal of Lutheran Ethics is at <http://www.ELCA.org/jle/article.asp?k=721> on the Web.

[Yes, go read it. He names the pain, and gives his reasons for not naming the Name. It is an op ed to this Ed's bracketed words above. With this news release the ELCA is keeping the debate alive. That just might be some more of God's merciful hand in the mix—for the benefit of us ELCA folks. If so, then "Thy will being done." In which case, count it all joy!]

Submissions to THE LUTHERAN. 700 word limit.

VERSION ONE

Why Jesus?

People of many different religions are all around us these days. Jewish folks always were around, but now there are Buddhist and Hindu temples in my home town (St. Louis)—and several mosques. We meet people who worship at these places daily—at the store, at work, all over.

So the question comes up—if not directly from them as we interact, then often in our own hearts: Why Jesus? Why not Muhammed, or the Buddha, or the Hindu Brahman, or Moses, or New Age, or whatever? Why Jesus? It's not just recent immigrants to the USA. My grandchildren raise the same question—and I baptized all five of them!

Is this new? Not really. It's already in the New Testament. Right from the git-go. People then were mostly satisfied with the religions they had. Moses “worked” very well for Jews, thank you. Greeks and Romans didn't need any more gods. So why Jesus?

St. Paul, missionary superstar, heard it often—from both groups. First at the Jewish synagogues where he checked in when he came to town, and then from the “Greeks,” the non-Jewish majority population, when he went downtown. Jews didn't see any need for Jesus. Neither did the Greeks. Why Jesus?

Same question, but two different questioners. So Paul has two different answers.

Jewish Answer

In Acts 13:39 Paul speaks to Jewish questioners. “Everyone who believes in Jesus is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” Did you hear that? Jesus offers something Moses can't deliver, even though Moses was the best God had given us—so far. Jesus is Good News for us Jews. Both Good and really New. Moses could take care of “little” sins, but you were still stuck—“un-free” —from the “biggies,”

starting with the first commandment. Who trusts in God with “all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, all the time?” Nobody. Moses offers no help here.

But Jesus does. So Paul tells them: Jesus, crucified and risen, covers even mega-sins with his offer of forgiveness. Good Friday and Easter Sunday were really mega events! Genuinely “good” for Jewish ears, and marvelously “new.” And it’s a freebee! Good News indeed! For Jews who “got it,” their doxology was “Jesus is the Messiah!” Nothing against Moses, but Jesus is where it’s at.

Greek answer.

Paul’s “Greek” answer to Why Jesus? is different. Remember that famous Mars Hill dialogue (Acts 17). Here Paul responds with “resurrection from the dead.” That’s a switch. Here’s why. Greeks knew nothing about Moses and Sinai and all that, so Paul can’t start there.

But Greeks had a problem. They were flumoxed, sometimes terrified, by death. Humans are so marvelously different from all other creatures that they really should NOT be mortal. Yet everybody dies. No real help from the Greek gods for this. Plato the philosopher offered this solution. He claimed that it was only the body that died, but that the “real me” (call it spirit, mind, psyche) was death-proof. So when a body died, it was no big deal. The “real me” survived. That convinced some. Yet Greeks still wailed at the graveside.

With Greeks Paul starts by deepening the diagnosis. See I Cor. 15. It’s not just bodies that die. It’s God’s own kids, now God’s renegade kids (a.k.a. sinners), biting the dust. The “stinger” in death is this sin-business, and sin gets its killer-clout from God’s law. The axiom is simple: “The wages of sin is death.” The “real me” is renegade too—not death-proof at all. That’s the real terror of death. Total wipeout.

To lick death you have to lick sin and the law. Plato didn't have a clue. Jesus IS that clue. So Paul preaches Christ's resurrection on Mars Hill, God's "crazy" gift so renegade kids can cope with death—and lick it! "It's for you." It's a freebee. Is that "good"? Is that "new"? You betcha. For Greeks who "got it," the response was "Jesus (not Caesar, not Zeus) is Lord!"

That's the way Paul did it. Will it work today? We won't know until we've tried.

VERSION TWO

Why Jesus? Why Jesus at all?

Help From Luther

At the end of his explanation to the Apostles Creed in the Large Catechism Luther says: "These articles of the Creed, therefore, divide and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside the Christian church [*ausser der Christenheit*], whether heathen, Turks [=Muslims], Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God, nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing. They remain in eternal wrath and damnation, for they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit."

Surprise and Paradox

This statement surprises. Luther grants that people "outside the Christian Church" nevertheless do (or, at least, can) "believe in and worship only the one true God." Can he really mean that? Shouldn't Luther instead say that these people are worshipping false gods, not the one true God?

But he doesn't. Even though they are "believing in" the one and only God there is, he says, they do not "know what his attitude is toward them." When you don't know God's attitude toward you—does God like me or not?—you simply can't be "confident" about the God you are "believing in and worshipping." You always have to be on guard—required sacrifices, required behavior, required everything—to make sure (if you really can) to keep this God on your side.

Notice the "fide" in the middle of that word "confident." That's the Latin word for "faith," for trusting the very God you "believe in and worship." If you don't know your God's attitude toward you, how can you possibly trust that deity?

That's where Jesus comes into the picture as Luther reflects on "Why Jesus?" He uses a surprising verb, "having," and connects it to Christ. The no-confidence folks "do not HAVE Christ," he says. That's a depth diagnosis. It's not HAVING wrong ideas about God in their heads. No, it's more about the heart than about the head. They don't HAVE what they need—in the heart—to be "confident" about God. And now Luther pushes the envelope. When you aren't confident about God, he says, you are already in hell—in hell now—long before you die. Check the verb. "They REMAIN in eternal wrath and damnation." Notice he doesn't say they'll go to hell. They are there already. Until Christ enters the picture, until they "have" Christ, that doesn't change. It "remains" from here to eternity.

"Damnation" is not a dirty word in the Bible. Nor is talk about God's "wrath." They are hospital words. Clinical terms. Diagnostic terms. Like cancer. The patient is terminal. And what makes damnation so grim is that God isn't going to do anything about it. He'll not intervene. Paul talks about this as "God gave up on them." That's what wrath and damnation mean in the Bible.

The super exception is Jesus. In Jesus God is trumping wrath and damnation, rescuing no-confidence sinners from their terminal diagnosis.

So how to HAVE this rescue work for you? Having Christ is the answer. And how do you HAVE Christ? Believing equals having. You trust him and his forgiveness promise and you get it. Luther had a folksy phrase for this. Only four German words pasted together into two words: "Glaubstu, hastu." "When you trust (Jesus), you have him." It's that simple. Jesus said so himself—over and over again.

What's the benefit of "having" Jesus? St. John (3:36) gives the answer that Luther quoted often: "Whoever believes the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not will never see that life, but the wrath of God remains upon him."

That's Luther's catechism answer to the "Why Jesus?" question So that the already damned may have Christ as Lord [*Lord means "owner" in both Hebrew and Greek*]. When you HAVE him, you HAVE what he has, the life that lasts. Additional goodies come with that. You get "illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit." And they remain.

Is that Good News or what?

[From Higgins Road]

Good afternoon, Ed,

Having read both versions and shared with two colleagues, here's some quick feedback and a question:

First, it's the second version that connects better, as it offers more substance. The first seemed a bit, well, glib rather

than inviting. So, to the question. In the second, in the paragraph (4th from bottom) that begins "So how to HAVE this rescue work for you?"-you say that "believing equals having. You trust him and his forgiveness promise and you get it." That sounds like decision theology. Where is the confession that "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel... ."?

Thanks, again, for your time and your interest.

Student Achievement in Lutheran Confessional Theology

Colleagues, Here's some theology coming from the term papers and final exams in that Augsburg-Aha! course taught by Ron Neustadt and ES in Springfield IL this past quarter.

*Peace and joy!
Ed Schroeder*

In her essay on the Triune God a student asked: "How would I respond to someone who told me that she didn't believe that God exists?" Her response was: "I would give them a Bible. Tell them to read it and learn that God does exist." Prompted ES to suggest this alternative line of response to the doubter:

- 1. Let's stop for a moment talking about "IF" God exists.*
- 2. Let's just talk personal life stuff for starters.*

3. What is it that you fear the most, love the most, trust the most? Fear, love, trust are verbs of the heart.
4. The Bible says: Whatever it is that you fear, love, trust, THAT is the God you already are connected too—by your own choice.
5. Luther once said: Whatever your heart is hanging onto, THAT is the God that is real for you. Even if you argue—in your head— that “God doesn’t exist.”
6. So everybody has some god, but different folks have different gods, different things, different “powers,” that they hang their hearts on. Sometimes in terror and fear (I’m gonna lose my job!—and I’m hanging my heart on keeping my job!). Sometimes in love and trust. (I just love my retirement account—my good looks, my achievements, my moxie, whatever, for the security it gives me. I trust it with my whole heart.)
7. God-talk that is important is not about something in your head (does God exist or not?), it’s about stuff going on in your heart: What are you hanging onto for dear life? Stuff you fear or love or trust or sometimes all three together on the same stuff..
8. Then let’s ask: “How’s your god doing these days? Is your god taking care of you—giving you all the stuff you really need to live in peace and joy? Also finally to cope with your own death?”
9. Well, if your god isn’t doing a perfect job for you, then you ought to think about “switching” gods, right?
10. Switch to some God who can supply all the stuff. Especially the big stuff about coping with your failures, your troubles, your guilt, your messing-up—or nowadays the “mess” of the world you and I live in—finally, your death.
11. I’ve got a God to recommend for that. Name is Jesus. He OFFERS a zinger of a PROMISE for all that stuff mentioned

in #9.

12. If you've got time, I'll tell you more

Theology of the Lutheran Confessions Final Exam

Marilyn Dudley

I think my confessions grade should be A.

Section A:

Essay 1

The Church and Ministry: Articles 5, 7, 8, 14, 15

A. Article 5 says that for us to obtain faith, God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these means, He gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession defines the church as the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel. The unity of the church comes from trust in Christ. It is not necessary for true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. And Article 8 adds that because in this life many hypocrites and evil people are mixed in with them, a person may use the sacraments even when they are administered by evil people. Article 14 teaches that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call. Article 15 teaches that keeping church regulations made by human beings are ok if they may be kept without sin and serve to maintain peace and good order in the church. Further these things must not burden consciences, serve

to appease God or to earn grace or make satisfaction for sin. These things are good for nothing and contrary to the gospel.

- B. The way that these articles about the church and ministry are connected to the Hub is that they are all grounded in justification by faith alone in Christ. By God's grace, we are saved NOT through our own merit, but through Christ's merit, when we so believe. We obtain faith when we hear the Gospel through preaching, the sacraments or absolution. The rim is the distinction between law and gospel. So the test here will be are they "ya gottas," law or "ya gettas," gospel. It is not "if I do this, then God will do that for me." It's I do this because God loved me first and gave his son Jesus Christ to die for my sins. Any human regulations or ceremonies must be evaluated on the basis of whether they try to "over-ride" or negate the free gift of salvation through faith alone.
- C. I think there is a lot of false teaching on this spoke. An example is churches that teach that works are required for salvation. Probably one of the popular proponents of this teachings is Rick Warren, "40 Days of Purpose," where he says that salvation depends on the right choices and decisions that I make and how I follow through. It is definitely Law: "ya gottas." In response to that teaching, I would say that salvation is a free gift from God. My salvation was paid for by Christ's death-the "sweet swap" according to Martin Luther. I need only believe it to get it. There is nothing I can "do" (works) to earn my salvation. John 3:16: For God so loved the World, that He gave His only Son so that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. No mention of works here!

Section B: Essay 2

Baptism: Articles 9, 11, 12

- A. Article 9 states that Baptism is necessary for salvation, that the Grace of God is offered through it, and that children (including babies) should be baptized. The Apology says that God gives the Holy Spirit to those so baptized. Luther argues that baptizing babies must be ok with God because it has existed for over 1500 years without any obvious correction by God. If babies had not been baptized, then the Holy Spirit would have been given to no one and no one would be saved and there would have been no church. Articles 11 and 12 concern confession and repentance. Enumerating all misdeeds and sins is not necessary or even possible. The apology maintains that we believe the absolution and regard as certain that the forgiveness of sins is given to us freely on account of Christ and that we should maintain that we are truly reconciled to God by this faith. In Article 12, it is taught that those who have sinned after baptism obtain forgiveness of sins whenever they come to repentance and that absolution should not be denied them by the church. Such faith comforts the heart and puts it at peace. Good works, the fruit of repentance, should follow.
- B. Again this connects to the hub of the Good News: Justification by Faith in Christ, Faith Alone. Baptism (water and word) delivers the Holy Spirit which allows us to believe and thereby be saved. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. Baptism is one of the pipelines from God to trusting people. Confession is a return to Baptism: to the promise, a way to remember baptism. The rim, the distinction between law and gospel comes into play so that if there are any "ya gotta's", (law) then Christ is not in the picture. So for example if it is taught that you must believe before being baptized, that becomes a "do this so God will do that," that is a "ya gotta." Baptism is part of the free gift of God (Gospel).

The right use of Baptism is through remembering our Baptism by daily repentance and starting anew each day—being born anew each day.

- C. An example of false teaching on this article are those churches that teach that baptism is valid only if it's preceded by a personal confession of faith and thus babies shouldn't be baptized. I would respond and say that Grace (salvation) is a free gift of God and is to be offered to all—men, women, children, and infants. The Bible instructs us to baptize all nations—not just adults. Children are received into the grace of God when they are offered to God through baptism. Their faith will grow because they have received the Holy Spirit and have become children of God. Baptism is God's claiming us as his own children.*

Essay 2 B: The pipeline.

The term ministry is like a pipeline. The pipeline image first shows that the promise comes from God and that faith comes from hearing the promise and believing it—not through any good works or any work on our own, but through faith. The pipeline image is like a water line bringing water to your house from the city water plant, only in this case it is the pipeline from God which is the delivery system. Or it might be called the media (middle agencies) which bring the promise from the time when Jesus lived, died and rose again, into the future (now) to us who didn't live in Jesus' time. These media consist of the Gospel proclaimed and the sacraments (baptism, holy communion, and absolution of sins). When the "valves on the pipeline and the faucet are turned on," the promise flows to the receivers. The church is the assembly of believers where the Word (Gospel) is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel. The church is an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons. The Gospel is the good news being transferred or

delivered via the pipeline. Public preaching, Baptism, Holy Communion, and Absolution are part of the pipeline-the means of grace. The Holy Spirit uses these media to connect people to Christ's promise. The Holy Spirit works through these media to transfer the promise of Christ ("goodies" of Christ's world/work) to people. Christ-connected people talking, praying, consoling, caring are ways to take care of or to open the pipeline. We are all (baptized people) called to be part of caring for the pipeline to deliver faith and fight sin.

The Augsburg Confession also says that even when the ungodly do as Christ commands-proclaiming the Good news and administering the sacraments "gospelly" – these actions work to bring people to faith and keep them Christ-connected. The pipeline functions even when the "valve-openers" are not Gospel-trusters.

Tom Galyen Essay #1

Article XVIII Free Will

- A. What do the Augsburg Confession and the Apology say about Free Will?The Augsburg Confession concerning Free Will states that we have free will but it is limited. This God-given free will allows us to live a normal, honorable or "natural" life. This free will allows us to carry out our duties to our families, our jobs, our communities, even to our country. This might be compared to having the ability to carry out the left hand duties that every human being on earth is charged with by God, which is working for the care of all that God has created. We have an internal wiring, of sorts, to know right from wrong and a built in desire to do the right thing in most circumstances, as long as the right thing does not interfere with our desire to look out for number one. To

show that they were teaching nothing new the reformers quoted St. Augustine's *Hypognosticon*: "We confess that there is a free will in all human beings. For all have a natural, innate mind and reason ... they do have the freedom to choose good or evil only in the external works of this life." However, we also have the free will to do evil, such as worship false idols, commit murder, etc. The Confession states that by good they meant only that which is natural and all persons whether or not they are Christians can do it. They did point out that this ability does not exist or endure without God for everything is from and through him. However a human being can by exercising this same free will do evil such as idol worship, murder and the like.

The reformers rejected the teachings of those who said that we can keep the commandments of God without God's grace and the Holy Spirit, or that we are able to truly fear, love, and believe in God solely on our own power. In rejecting this teaching the reformers emphasized their position that our free will is limited.

In the *Apology to the Confutation*, the reformers pointed out that although their opponents received and agreed with their confession that they had gone on to describe a "middle way" siding neither with the Pelagians, nor with the Manichaeans. The first they said ascribed too much free will and the latter took away all liberty. The reformers then pointed out that there was very little difference between their opponents' view and the Pelagians, because both claimed that people could keep the commandments of God apart from the Holy Spirit.

The reformers then went on to illuminate and strengthen their confession by stating that human will does have

freedom as far as reason can comprehend by itself, and that this freedom allows us to perform acts of civil righteousness. It allows us to talk about God, and even to an extent obey the laws of the second tablet of the Ten Commandments. This would include honoring our parents and rulers, not committing adultery, robbery, or murder. We have a basic ability to reason right from wrong and a desire to do what is right. However, the power of concupiscence is so powerful that people will normally obey their evil desires rather than sound judgment. Boy, could I write volumes on that subject. In addition to this desire to look out for ourselves before others, is the fact that as Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 2:2) that we follow "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." That for these reasons even civil righteousness is rare.

The Apology teaches that although we do have free will and the power to perform external works of the law we do not have free will to do those things which require spiritual help, such as fear God, have true faith in God, and have the true conviction that God cares for us, hears our prayers and petitions, and forgives us our sins. These are works of the first tablet of the commandments and the heart cannot produce results without the Holy Spirit. We can see this if we look at what we believe in our hearts about the will of God. That is do we really believe that God cares for us and hears our prayers and forgives us. The reformers teach that it is difficult for the saints to have such faith, and it is impossible for the ungodly. However this belief can come into existence in terrified hearts when we hear the gospel and receive consolation.

All people ought to know that God requires civil righteousness (left hand works) and to some extent we are able to achieve it. However, to fully achieve civil righteousness and spiritual righteousness (enabling us to carry out our right hand duties) we must have the Holy Spirit within us, and the Holy Spirit is given to us free.

B. What is the connection between this article of faith and the Hub of the Wheel? We created humans have two duties assigned to us from God. They can be called the left hand and right hand duties. The left hand duties are those concerned with the care of all that God has created, especially that within our individual spheres of influence. I, as a human being have the assignment of caring for my family, and all that which is within the sphere of my daily world. This care for God's creation comes in the form of obeying the second tablet of the Ten Commandments, to honor my mother and father, to abstain from adultery, and all forms of criminal behavior, etc. In this I have free will to do good or evil. I may want to do good for various even altruistic reasons and to an extent can carry out my duties. However, I am unable to perform this assignment to the perfect degree demanded by God. As an example, I am unable to perfectly keep even the commandment against murder, for although I have never killed anyone, Jesus states "But anyone who says, 'you fool' will be in danger of the fire of hell," and I can't drive anywhere without thinking this about a number of drivers.

Now if we cannot carry out our left hand assignments as God wills, we certainly cannot carry out our right hand assignment which is the redemption of all that God has created. In this we have no free will at all because it

requires the power of the Holy Spirit in us, and he takes up residence only in those who are justified and made right with God. The "Good News" of the Gospel is that we are justified or made right with God by faith and by faith alone.

Now the law demands perfect obedience to the law of God which would mean perfect carrying out of both the civil and spiritual assignments from God; tasks which are impossible to carry out in our own power or by our free will. However, when we are justified and made right with God by our faith in Jesus, then the Holy Spirit enables us to carry out these assignments, and we now have the knowledge that even when we now fail in our attempts that we have forgiveness and we can pick our selves up and try again.

C. An example of false teaching on Free Will and how I would respond to it. A good example I think is one which I presently see on the TBN network. I have watched Pastor Ron Parsely on his program preach to his audience that in this year of 2008, that if you demonstrate to God your faith by "planting a seed of 2008 dollars" then God will then take control of your circumstances and lead you out of poverty to wealth. If it is your will to better yourself then the way to do it is to "invest" your money in God and he will open the windows of heaven and pour out your blessing. This is because God wants to bless us, but **REQUIRES** us to prove our faith in him by planting a seed, and when the seed is planted, then God will be obligated to carry out his part of the "bargain" and grant you what you want. I see this as a plain "works" program in that when I do this then God must do that. However where are Christ and the Holy Spirit? Pastor Ron does say that Christ and the Holy Spirit are calling the

people to send in their seed, and that when you do then you will be blessed, but that is as far as any mention of Jesus or the Holy Spirit goes.

My response to this is that if we live in faith and with the power of the Holy Spirit we believe that God truly loves us and cares for us, then he will take care of us whether we send 2,008 dollars to a pastor or not. That God will take care of our needs no matter what our station in life is, and the Holy Spirit will enable us to experience what Paul described when he wrote to the Philippians, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:12-13) This knowledge was a gift of the Holy Spirit to him and also to all who truly trust in God. This is where the hub "The good news" of our acceptance by God through faith enables us to face difficulties in our lives, and then we will be able to carry out both our right and left hand duties.

Essay #2

Article XVII The Return of Christ to Judgment

- A. What do the Augsburg Confession and the Apology say about The Return of Christ? The teaching in this article is short and was uncontested by the opponents of the Confession. The reformers taught that Jesus will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise the dead, to give eternal life and joy to those who believe and are the elect, but to condemn those who do not believe and the devils to hell and eternal punishment. They rejected the teachings of the Anabaptists that

unbelievers and devils will not suffer eternal torture and torment.

They also rejected the teachings of some Jewish teaching of their day that before the resurrection of the dead, that saints and righteous people will possess a secular kingdom and annihilate all the ungodly.

In the Apology the reformers again state their confession that Christ will appear at the end of the world and will raise up all the dead giving eternal life and joy to the godly, but condemning the ungodly to endless torment with the devil.

B. What is the connection between this article of faith and the Hub of the Wheel? I believe that this is one of the Articles that really go to the core of the hub. It is a statement that brings the utmost horror to the heart of the unbeliever when they think of the consequences of their life choice. We all, at one time or another, think about what will happen at the end of time. On television we have the media telling us how close we are to the end. One recent program on the History Channel even pointed out that some of the more well known prophecies of various religions predict the end of the world by the year 2012. The world could be blown up by just about anyone at anytime. If that doesn't happen then we will either drown when global warming melts the ice caps, or starve when global warming reduces the harvests of food to a level that cannot sustain life. Civilization as we know it will end when the oil runs out and we kill each other to obtain this vital commodity. According to some scientists super germs and bacteria are growing at an exponential rate and we will soon have no known cure for the super diseases that they may bring.

We are told that we are evil and deserving of God's judgment. We have displeased God because we have not helped his people Israel enough or because we have helped them too much. We are told that we are evil because we have raped and destroyed God's creation and we therefore have no hope.

Above all of these voices of gloom and doom we hear the message of the gospel. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. This simple refrain resounds against the harsh pharisaical shouts of the "end of time" law followers. God loved all of his creation two thousand years ago when he sent his Son into the world to save it, and there is no Biblical proof that his love has in any way diminished since then. Jesus will return at a time that will be determined by God and not at any time calculated by an earthly "End Time Prophet".

The bad news for many is the fact that there will be a day of judgment. The reformers and their opponents agree on that, and even the "End Time Prophets" agree on that. There is no word in the Bible or the Augsburg Confession that in any way refutes this claim. However, the good news is that no-one really needs to fear this if they will accept the free gift of reconciliation granted by God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Those who teach that God is too much of a loving God to actually condemn anyone to hell are wrong. God is truth and therefore must be true to his word. If he were not then Jesus died for nothing, and God's greatest act of love and grace was empty. Jesus himself promised that those who believe will be saved and those who do not are already condemned.

C. An example of false teaching on The Return of Christ and how I would respond to it. So now we come to the Hal Lindsey's, the John Hagee's, the Tim LaHaye's and the Jerry Jenkins's of our modern world. The Pharisees of Jesus day would be very comfortable with their teachings. Right makes might and only through mighty violent acts can those "left behind" be able to work out their salvation by destroying the forces of the Antichrist. The blood in the legends of Gilgamesh, or Beowulf did not run as deep, and all for the glory of God, so that the left behind Tribulation Force may prove their faithfulness to God by exterminating his enemies. As if, of course, God is not able to destroy anything he wishes.

According to Barbara Rossing, the words that these messengers of doom like most are of course the rather mysterious words of Daniel and Revelation. But these words were written to actually give consolation to people who were going through actual tribulation in their day. And how did those people react to the words of these books? They mainly responded, according to Rossing, by "patient endurance" or resistance, not armed resistance as in the Left Behind books, but by trusting in the good news of the gospel and living as best they could in the trust they had in the promises of Jesus.

I think the best response to the Left Behind teaching is a phrase that Barbara Rossing attributes to Martin Luther. "If I knew the world were going to end tomorrow I would plant a tree." I think this best shows the faith that we should have in the promises of love and grace found in the gospel. The idea of planting a tree shows not just passive endurance of just going with the flow because I'm doomed anyway type of thinking, but rather a positive, forward looking trust, that when Christ does

return we will be found quietly performing our right hand assignment from God to allow the Holy Spirit to work through us for the redemption of all of his creation.

Section B

Question C: How has my own working theology changed during this course in the Lutheran Confessions?

My knowledge of the Lutheran Church has of course grown fantastically. As I said in class I was baptized at St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Hoboken, New Jersey, but when my family moved to Illinois there were no Lutheran Churches near where we lived, so we went to the "family" church. If I now had to identify the theology of this church I would have to say it has Anabaptist roots. For this reason I have always had problems being torn between these two opposed theologies. I went to a Jack Van Impe with friends from that area and heard, of course, teaching which reinforced the Anabaptist view. Still there has always somehow been a quiet voice keeping me from totally accepting those teachings. I became a member of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Urbana about 25 or so years ago, and although I took the new member class and many other classes by very good teachers, and even have taught many classes myself I have always been a little unsure of the basis of the teachings I am following. I have to admit that I never had real firm foundation for what I was teaching and as long as it was safely straight from the Bible and had a lot of history wrapped around it, I could do it quite well, while having some reservations. I do not know how many times I have prayed that God would send some great miracle to me so all doubt is removed. My name is Thomas and could live up to the nickname "the doubter," and since I'm also a twin, you

can see how I do identify with him.

After taking this course, and studying not only the Augsburg Confession, but the Confutation, and the Apology, as well as doing the reading for my paper on baptism, I have put most if not all those doubts to rest. One question I asked myself early on in this course was this, "If I was, at some time, required to baptize an infant could I in faith do it?" And until I wrote the essay that I did I could not truthfully answer that question. I can say now, however, that yes I could do that with no reservation at all, and have no doubt about my own.

I see results of this course in the preparation and presentation of the material for the "Lectionary Series" class that I teach. I try as much as possible to bring the people in the class to see the law and the gospel in each of the lessons we study.

In my years I have been to a church where after an immersion baptism one person in the back claimed that the baptized was not really baptized because her arm did not go under the water. At another they had men standing at the door to prevent women from entering who were not dressed appropriately according to their "rules". I have seen good and not so good in many churches even the Lutheran Church. I could not understand why this is. This course while it concentrated on the Confessions of our Church also gave me insight into where the other branches of Protestantism came from. I understand better their actions and I have a better understanding of where we as Lutherans may be headed. Last Sunday our pastor led us in looking at the draft paper on sexuality that just came out. As I listened to how they are working on it I saw in

the back of my mind Melanchthon and the Reformers working on the confessions in Augsburg in 1530.

If a Lutheran may confess to a little pride, I am proud to confess that I am a Lutheran.

The Augsburg Aha! – “Human Will and Human Works”

Colleagues,

Here's the final installment of handouts that Ron Neustadt and I used these weeks with students in Springfield, Illinois on the theology of the Augsburg Confession (1530). This one is on Human Will and Human Works (Augsburg Confession articles 6, 17-21).

Peace and joy!
Ed Schroeder

An introductory word about ethics in the theology of the AC. The Agenda for the Augsburgers is: How to “praise and teach good works in such a way as not to abolish the free promise and not to eliminate Christ.” Expressed positively: “How to keep the Gospel at the center and promote ethics at the same time.” Practically expressed it speaks to the issue raised in a recent ThTh posting [#509], where the pastor, called to account by a naval officer for not mentioning Christ when preaching a sermon on “ethics, living the Christian life,” responded thus: “Yes, we

need a Savior and the Gospel brings us the Good News that that Savior is Jesus who died and rose for us. [However] I do not feel that every sermon needs to make that point directly. Sermons can also address how we live our Christian life.” Does that indicate that he did indeed preach Christ when salvation was his topic, but when it was ethics, he could do that without “necessitating the crucified/risen Messiah?”

If so, then he needs to hear that this was exactly the position the Augsburgers decried in the AC and Apology. A sermon commending good works that does not necessitate Christ, that doesn’t “need” THE promise in urging Christians to action, is clearly a Christ-less sermon. Such sermons are “Jewish or Turkish (=Muslim),” in the language of the AC, but not Christian. “Caveat praedicator.” Let the proclaimer beware.

AC 6 The New Obedience.

The German AC text says: The faith that justifies us “should produce good fruits and good works,” and “we must do all such good works as God has commanded,” doing them “for God’s sake & not place our trust in them” for healing our relationship with God. That agenda, as St. Ambrose said, is “through faith alone.” [This is the first time in the AC that the expression “faith alone” occurs.]

The Latin AC text says: Faith “ought” [Latin: *debeat*] to bring forth good fruits & it “behooves” [Latin: *oportet*] faith to do the good works commanded by God.

N. B. the “fruit-bearing motif” (Gospel-grounded motivation) and the language of “God has commanded” (motivation from God’s law).

Confutation says: The “oughts and shoulds” about good works in AC 6 are right and proper. However “ascribing justification to

faith ALONE is diametrically opposite the truth of the Gospel.” Here are 10 Biblical texts to support our point. When the Augsburgers quote St. Ambrose to support their faith-alone idea, we say it is “in no way pertinent.”

Apology. There is no Article 6 in the Apology. Melanchthon included it in his big essay in Apology 4 on Justification. His opening sentence in Apology 4 is: “In the 4th, 5th, and 6th articles, and later in the 20th, they condemn us for teaching justification by faith alone.”

AC 17 Christ's Return

AC 17 makes the standard confession of what is confessed in the Apostles Creed. Concludes with two rejections. Rejected is the teaching that everyone will be saved. Rejected is the teaching of millennialists who claim that before the end “saints and righteous people alone will possess a secular kingdom and will annihilate all the ungodly.” Proponents of both of these teachings were on the scene in 1530.

The Confutators agree. There is no rejoinder in Apology 17.

AC 18 is about Freedom of the Will.

About which AC 18 says: Yes and No. (Note: The Latin term translated “will” is “arbitrium,” meaning “the ability to choose.”)

Yes: The Confessors say: humans have “some” freedom to choose, i.e., “an outwardly honorable life & to make choices among the things that reason comprehends.” The Latin AC text calls this “civil righteousness” (= right things in terms of human [= civic] society).

No: With reference to a sinner's relationship with God, there is no ability to choose, since sinners are already shaped by an "arbitrium" that has already made its choices: not to fear God, not to trust God, and instead of that to be concupiscent, "curved back into the self." Only with the assistance of the Holy Spirit (= God's merciful intervention) can this imprisoned arbitrium be changed. The Latin text adds a condemnation of the Pelagians.

Confutation 18 says this is OK. Claims that the right way on this issue is the middle way between Pelagians and Manichaeans (both designated heretics in the early church). Pelagians give too much, the Manichaeans too little freedom to human will. Then follow a string of Biblical texts to support this.

Apology 18 asks the Confutators how the Pelagians, whom they condemn, are really any different from what their own scholastic theology teaches. The possibilities for "civil righteousness," "outward works" of goodness, where the Reformers grant that the will has some freedom, are acknowledged. But even so, "civil righteousness is rare among men." And with reference to our God-relationship, sinners are "stuck" (un-free) in the shape that their God-relationship has when they were born into the world. Frequently Melanchthon will use the adjective "spiritual" to refer to this God-relationship where human will is un-free. Where human will does have "some" freedom, he uses such terms as "human," "philosophical," and "civil." His use of the term "spiritual" [geist-lich] here does not mean spooky or non-material [geist-ig]. [German has two different words to signal the difference. English has only the one word, "spiritual."] "Geistlich" designates the depth relationship, the primal relationship, between humans and God, between the Spirit of God and our own human spirit. It's a "coram deo" term for the divine-human interface. The only known agent for moving us from a bad "geistlich" relationship to a good one is the Holy Spirit.

That's what "spiritual" means in the English translation here.

Just for fun, read these two paragraphs from Luther.

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10

People say: "Yes, certainly, God has given us a free will." To this I reply: "To be sure, He has given us a FREE will; why then will you not let it remain free but make it your OWN will?" If you do with it what you will, it is not a free will. It is your own will. But God has given neither you nor any man your own will, for your own will comes from the devil and from Adam. They made the free will which they received from God into their own will. For a free will desires nothing of its own. It only cares for the will of God, and so it remains free, cleaving and clinging to nothing.

Hence you see that in this prayer God commands us to pray against ourselves, and so teaches us that we have no greater enemy than ourselves. For our will is the greatest power within us, and we must pray against it: my Father, suffer me not to have my will. Oppose my will and break it. Come what may, only let Thy will and not mine be done. For so it is in heaven; self-will is not found there. Let it be the same here on earth. Such a prayer, if it is offered, hurts our nature, for self-will is the deepest and mightiest evil in the world, and there is nothing which we love more than our own will. –Exposition of the Lord's Prayer for simple lay-folk, W.A. 2.104f.

AC 19 is about the Cause of Sin.

Even though God created everything, God is not the "cause" of sin. Sin's reality in the world is the work of the devil and the "will" of sinners just described above.

[Footnote: In Gen. 3, both Adam and Eve seek to trace the blame,

the cause, for sin back to God's own self. But God doesn't accept their counter-charge. As they do this, they "prove" that they are now original sinners, humans "not fearing God." "Fearing God" means to accept responsibility for my own sin as God shows it to me. "Not fearing God" is to pooh-pooh God's verdicts and sit in judgment on God ourselves.]

Confutators say: AC 19 is OK, and the Apology 19 merely repeats the earlier AC assertion.

AC 20 Faith and Good Works

This article basically summarizes our class readings and discussions from Article 4 on Justification. Notice all the "code" terms: We don't forbid good works at all. Rather we show how they can be done "in faith." FAITH (=promise-trusting), that's what makes any work "good." So we start by teaching: "Don't try to use works to reconcile God, get merit, etc. For reconciliation with God use Christ. Don't despise or displace Christ's merit and grace with merits of your own." Folks with "God-fearing and anxious consciences," (= serious Christians) find our teaching to be "the greatest consolation." Conscience, conscience, conscience (=people's self-perception, self-evaluation) is a major agenda for us—and in the Bible. Faith is the key. Faith is not "believing the history" about Jesus, but trusting the "effect of the history—forgiveness of sins, grace, etc." FAITH is to be understood not as knowledge...but as confidence which consoles and lifts up terrified hearts." [Note the root of the word confidence: fide = faith.]

After faith is rightly focused, then first folks are free to be able to do good works, and we do indeed promote that. Here's our rhetoric: "It is necessary to do good works." "It is the will of God." Christ-trusters "are so renewed and endowed with new affections as to be able to bring forth good works." Summary:

(46:35) You cannot accuse us of “forbidding good works. On the contrary...[our teaching] shows how we are enabled to do good works.”

Confutators: Only one objection. We said it before (at Article 4 on justification): “works do indeed merit the forgiveness of sins.” Lots of Bible passages say so. The AC 20 opinion was condemned in the church a thousand years ago.

Apology. Melancthon just throws up his hands! “What can we say about an issue that is so clear?” He doesn’t mince words: “those damnable writers of the Confutation who so impudently blaspheme Christ.” (227:2) We simply must stand up and confess this hub of the wheel, even if martyrdom awaits us. (227:7) He repeats the core statements from AC 20, applies the law/promise hermeneutic to the Bible texts which the Confut. quotes, says the claim that this doctrine was condemned 1000 yrs ago is “completely false.” We’re with St. Paul: “We do not overthrow the law about doing good works; we uphold it.” We commend good works by teaching “faith” first and then urging the faith-full to good works. [What more can I say?]

AC 21 Cult (=worship) of the Saints Honor the Saints, yes. Pray to them, no. Honor them: 2 ways (read AC 21 text). What are they?

Do not pray to them. For 3 reasons. What are they?

CONFUT 21 AC is wrong about no prayer to saints. There are many Bible quotes that talk about the saints praying, the angels too. [Many of these quotes are from the Apocrypha and the OT.]

APOL 21. Yes, there are Bible passages that talk about the saints praying, but none that say we should pray to them, or even ask them to pray for us. The right way to honor the saints

is as we said in AC 21. For anyone—saints or even Christ himself—to be a propitiator (a middle-person between us and God) 2 things are needed. Christ has both of them, the saints none of them. What are these two things?

Devotion to Mary. Apology 21:27 says: “Granted that blessed Mary prays for the church. . . [and] she is worthy of the highest honors.” And then a few lines later “The fact of the matter is that in popular imagination the blessed Virgin has completely replaced Christ.” How does Apology 21 seek to correct the error of Mary “replacing” Christ, and still hold on to the claim in the first sentence?

Theology of the Lutheran Confessions Final Examination

Name.....

I think my grade in this course should be _____

This Examination asks you to write 3 essays.

Section A. (two essays)

Select two topics (=two spokes) from the Wheel of the Augsburg Confession (our diagram of the wheel—hub, spokes and rim—from our first class session) and write one essay on each of those two topics that you chose.

In each essay answer the following:

- A. What is the teaching of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology on this “spoke,” this article of faith?
- B. What is the connection between this article of faith and

the Hub of the Wheel, the Gospel center of the diagram? How does the “rim” (the proper distinction between law and gospel) affect the teaching on this article of faith? [E.g., if you did NOT pay attention to the rim, how might that affect the spoke?]

- C. Give an example of a false teaching on this article, and then show how you would respond to that false teaching.

Section B. (one essay)

Select one of the following and write an essay to answer the question:

- A. Melancthon says that the Confutators were reading the Bible in the wrong way—even though they use many Bible passages in their statements. What was their “wrong way?” What does he say is the “right way?” Why does he think that his way to read the Bible is better?
- B. In our discussion of AC 5 we said: “This article understands the term ministry to be like a pipeline.” Use the “pipeline” picture to describe what all is happening when “ministry” takes place.
- C. Answer this question:
How has my own “working theology” changed during this course in the Lutheran Confessions? If yes, describe How? and Why? If no, describe Why not.

This is a take-home examination. Please return your completed examination to us via e-mail or USPS.

A Message from the Field: “Ed, You didn’t get law/gospel right!”

Colleagues,

Kathleen Creager discovered Crossings in the summer of 2006, I think it was. While residing, of all places, in America’s Calvinist Mecca, Grand Rapids, Michigan! But then THEIR publishing house—Eerdmans in Grand Rapids—just published the first-ever Crossings book, Bob Bertram’s A TIME FOR CONFESSING, whilst allegedly “more Lutheran” publishers demurred. Do denominational lines mean anything anymore? Things do get curiouser and curiouser. Yet perhaps even more curious is that Kathleen is doing a theology degree at Calvin Theological Seminary there in Grand Rapids! But all that’s a story in itself.

For now Kathleen is running with what she’s discovering—running fast, so far as I can tell. Couple weeks ago she came running after me to whisper the words in the Topic-line above: you got law/gospel wrong. You won’t be surprised that I paid attention. She was tweaking me about the last three paragraphs of ThTh #503—<https://crossings.org/thursday/2008/thur013108.shtml>—posted at the beginning of Lent—“Pardon My Imprisonment – Anticipating Ash Wednesday.”

After a couple of e-exchanges (with me trying NOT to think of Luke 11:7) I made this offer to Kathleen: “OK, you compose three paragraphs that do a better job; tell my why you think they’re better, and I’ll post it to the Crossings listserve and we’ll see what they say.” She did her part, so now I do mine.

Gold was the color at our Easter liturgies this past Sunday. I think Kathleen put a Golden Egg into my Easter basket. See if you want it in yours too.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

[Btw, this date, March 27, back in 1921 was Easter Sunday. Bob Bertram was born that day. It figures.]

Ed's original paragraphs: If you can't get the Holy Roman Empire to repent, Luther counseled his readers in the face of the Moslem jihad of his day, remember the Abrahamic finesse, how the patriarch whittled the numbers down (and God's mercy up) in interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah. "Would you spare that evil empire, God, if there were 50 righteous ones there? How about 45? 40? 30? 20? Maybe just 10?" And God always said yes. Finally, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."

"Surrogate repentance" was Bob Bertram's tag for Luther's proposal to try the Abrahamic finesse. Repentance on the part of a remnant works rescue for the unrepentant as well. How about that for this year's Lenten discipline? [I wonder if we could stick with it for 40 straight days in our own household—in addition to walking that Siegfried Reinhardt Lenten path on the Crossings website.] "God be merciful to me and all the rest of us in bondage to those p-and-p's of our empire, those encrypted aliens within us too, with their engines running." And God said: "For the sake of ten who repent, I will relent."

Yes, Sodom didn't survive, but Vienna in Luther's day did. Sodom's fate came to pass not because God's mercy was untrustworthy. It was rather that hardly anybody deemed it

worth trusting. What if 600-plus listserve receivers—or just 50? 45? 40? 30? 20? or just 10?—deemed it worth trusting in our own case? What all might happen, both in, and to, the one remaining empire in our world today?

Here's Kathleen:

OK, Professor Schroeder, here is my revision of the last three paragraphs of ThTh#503. You may wonder what took me so long, because I didn't really revise all that much, and most of the words are yours. What took so long is all the other versions I wrote and then threw away.

If you can't get the Holy Roman Empire to repent, Luther counseled his readers in the face of the Muslim jihad of his day, remember the Abrahamic finesse, how the patriarch whittled the numbers down (and God's mercy up) in interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah. "Would you spare that evil empire, God, if there were 50 righteous ones there? How about 45? 40? 30? 20? Maybe just 10?" And God always said yes. Finally, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." If only a few of Luther's readers were to heed his call to repentance, perhaps God would spare Vienna. What if 600-plus listserve receivers—or just 50? 45? 40? 30? 20? or just 10? – were to heed a call to Lenten repentance? "God be merciful to me and all the rest of us in bondage to those p-and-p's of our empire, those encrypted aliens within us too, with their engines running." What all might happen, both in, and to, the one remaining empire in our world today?

Yes, Sodom didn't survive, but Vienna in Luther's day did. Sodom's fate came to pass not because God's mercy was untrustworthy. It was rather that no one deemed it worth trusting. Even Lot did not believe and get out of the city as

he was told, but had to be taken by the hand and led away. What then would make us think we can repent? God promises to spare the many for the sake of a few righteous, but can we become righteous? Isn't it impossible? Some outside lord has to intervene. Ah – and he has! “Just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.” (Rom 5.18-19) For the sake of Jesus Christ, the righteous One, God spares the many. Not only spares them, but even gives them Christ's righteousness. So repent! Mercy, justification, life, and righteousness are yours.

What makes it “better” than the original three paragraphs? I think it is better because it more clearly makes the call to repentance a “gospel thing,” and because it says the “Abrahamic finesse” is about Christ's righteousness rather than our repentance. There is a third thing I wanted to “improve” but gave up on – I think ThTh#503 mis-states or at least over-states Luther's use of that Abrahamic finesse argument. But I found that I am not clever enough to make that better while still keeping both the reference to the Abrahamic finesse and the references to empire, to tie back to the very beginning of the ThTh.

In more detail –

*** Why a call to repentance is a gospel imperative ***

Repentance is a response to the law – confession and contrition, recognizing that we do not fear and trust God and we deserve God's wrath and condemnation, and that there is absolutely nothing we can do to save ourselves. It is also a turning away from trusting the wrong deities, turning to

trusting the true God – and in the Lutheran understanding of law and gospel, that turning-to can only be a response to (an effect of) the gospel. So – is the command to respond to the law and the gospel in this way a law imperative or a gospel imperative?

1. Which direction are the cause and effect happening in “Repent and be saved”? In the law and gospel grammar of ThTh#501–<https://crossings.org/thursday/2008/thur011708.shtml>–does it mean “If you repent, then God will save”? Or does it mean “Because God saves, therefore repent”? Looked at this way, I think the law statement is self-contradictory. If “God will save” is conditional on my repentance, then I am in part saving myself, which makes “God will save” not true.
2. Law language makes repentance into a work, just one more example of trusting the wrong thing – our own repentance.
3. A law imperative to repent is circular – being told to confess that we don’t and can’t do what the law calls for and to turn away from the wrong deities, and the law calls for us to confess that we don’t and can’t do what the law calls for and to turn away from the wrong deities, and we can’t. “Not only that we don’t, or won’t, turn away from these deities. We can’t – even if we wanted to. We’re unable, incapable.”
4. From ThTh#170: “But repentance is tough. Repentance is hard to do even for one person. It’s like dying, says Jesus, like crucifixion. No one in their right mind would do it, unless Unless the alternative were even worse. As it is. But that conviction takes faith. And for that repenters need help so that it becomes a repentance unto life, and not a repentance unto despair. According to the Word of God such help is available.”

Repenters first need faith, need the help that the Word of God

promises. It follows that a call to repentance is a gospel imperative.

**** Why the call to repentance in ThTh#503 can too easily be read as a law imperative ****

It may be true that, in the context of the entire essay, the call to repentance is not stated as a law imperative. But for some of us (well, at least for one of us!) who have not been studying these things for decades, gospel is not readily apparent in the last two paragraphs. There are two sentences that are more easily read as law.

- 1. "Repentance on the part of a remnant works rescue for the unrepentant as well." "Works"!! And is it really repentance that rescues? That would not "necessitate Christ."*
- 2. " I wonder if we could stick with it for 40 straight days" "Stick with it" is a phrase more usually associated with a "got to" than a "get to." And "I wonder if we could" has a far different meaning than " GO for it! You CAN do it." (ThTh#501)*

**** Why the call to repentance in the revision is more clearly gospel ****

- 1. Eliminated the language that was more easily read as law.*
- 2. Added a reference back to the section of the ThTh that explained that Christ has already conquered the principalities and powers. Used language that is closer to the "gospel grammar" formula – (Because) This is what Christ has done for you. So (therefore) repent.*

**** Why it is better to tie the "Abrahamic finesse" to Christ's righteousness than to our repentance ****

Genesis 18:23-32 is not so much a story of surrogate repentance

as a story of surrogate righteousness. There is no talk of repenting or turning. For the sake of a few "tsadiq" [Ed: Hebrew for "a righteous one"] God would forgive the whole city. But "no one living is righteous before [God]." (Ps 143.2) Even Lot did not believe and get out of the city as he was told, but had to be taken by the hand and led away. So who are these righteous for whom God will forgive many? "The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." (Isa 53.11) "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. . And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'" (Jer 33.14-16) "Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." (Rom 5.18-19)

Does God spare the many for the sake of a few who are righteous? Yes! For the sake of Jesus Christ, the (only) righteous one, God spares all who trust his promise. Not only spares them, but even gives them Christ's righteousness. For the sake of Christ, God spares the many who keep on trusting the principalities and powers even while they (we) trust the promise, simul justus et peccator, always needing to repent, every day being "buried with Christ by baptism into death, that like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Christ's death and resurrection work rescue for the repentant (simul unrepentant) ones.

Peace,

Obama and His Pastor – Is God Damning America, or Not? That is the Question.

Colleagues,

The Word of God broke out of our American churches since last we met and spilled out into the streets. It became national news. It focused, of all things, on a black preacher's sermon from long ago. You couldn't have invented this. Truth IS stranger than fiction. God must have had a hand in it. It was Barack Obama's pastor proclaiming that God is damning America. The news-creators of our nation, not daring to ask "Is it true?" presented it to us as a matter of "damage control." Damage to Obama, since it was HIS pastor. Mega-question, of course, is "damage control" for America if it should prove true that Wright is not wrong.

Before I even got thinking about this week's ThTh post, my brother Ted Schroeder, recently retired inner-city pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in St. Louis, offered a "freebee" for me to post this week. No surprise, it was about the Obama/Wright kerfuffle..

Now I should tell you: my brother Ted, though white, has thick slices of a black preacher in him by virtue of his three decades as pastor in a black congregation on St. Louis' northside. Ted's

more radical than I am. Yes, he is. Throughout the years of his pastoring he often was doing his theology out on the street. I've never marched in protest parades for just causes in St. Louis. But Ted has. And one of his "humble" claims to fame is that as a result of one such public action he wound up in the same jail cell with Dick Gregory right here in our home town of St. Louis.

After I read Ted's words, I was moved – you'll not be surprised – to compose some prose of my own. Ted goes to bat for the black preacher. My words are counsel to Obama. Obama's and Wright's denomination is the UCC, United Church of Christ. Ted and I are ELCA Lutherans. UCC and ELCA are in pulpit-and-altar fellowship with each other. So Ted and I are mostly doing shop-talk around the family table.

Ted's text comes first, mine comes second.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

In defense of the Rev. Jeremiah Wright of Chicago (by Rev. Ted Schroeder of Kansas City, Missouri)

Sound bites from sermons by the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright of Chicago have caused a stir in the U.S. media. In one sample Pastor Wright, an African American minister in the United Church of Christ, proclaimed: "I do not say to you 'God bless America,' but God damn America." And America has reacted in anger and perhaps astonishment. His words sound vulgar, profane, and un-American in the extreme. Yet when he first spoke these words, there was no national outcry, not even a local one.

Out of probably 2,000 sermons preached by Dr. Wright to his Chicago congregation in the past thirty-seven years, these few sentences have been resurrected and broadcast across the nation and probably around the world. On CNN on March 14 one white commentator, speaking for the church, criticized Pastor Wright and said that the Church is supposed to bless America, pray for America, not damn America. (All our politicians have the savvy to say repeatedly, "God bless America!")

Rev. Wright did not preach hate for America. To preach God's divine judgment is not the same as hate. He did not dissociate himself from his responsibilities as a citizen of America. As a prophet called by God, he proclaimed God's damnation for America's excesses of wealth, abuse of power, violence, and war, for the harm done by us to persons who are suffering, starving, and dying throughout the world. There is a huge difference between hating and pronouncing God's judgment.

If only Wright had used more polite language, who in national politics or the media would have been aroused? He might have even sounded biblical by saying, "Woe to you, United States of America, for your..." and ticked off his complaints of injustice. Who would have complained? Then again, who would have even noticed? If Jeremiah Wright had not been Sen. Barack Obama's pastor, who would have cared at all about the ranting of one black preacher in south side Chicago? I write not to defend Senator Obama but to attest to biblically sound prophetic preaching in the 21st century.

Pastor Wright did not choose his words carelessly or lightly. To hear a man of the cloth use such words as "damn you" is stressful. One might think God could not possibly approve. Yet in the eighth chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, God's spokesperson St. Peter responded to a man who basically had offered him a bribe, "Your money perish with you!" (in

polite English). However, the original Greek text reads: "To hell with you and your money." Peter, how dare you? But there it is.

In the Hebrew and Greek texts of The Holy Bible, the word "woe" comes often from the lips of prophets such as Jeremiah, Amos, and Habakkuk and also Jesus. Many biblical scholars agree that the Hebrew words "oe" and "hoee" and the Greek "ouai" should often be translated "damn you" if the translator is hoping to convey in plain English the original intent of the speaker/writer. Our modern day Jeremiah of Chicago should not be so readily condemned.

When John the Baptizer harangued the scribes and Pharisees, asking "Who warned you to flee from the wrath ('mellousees orgees') to come?" it is clear that he or one of his disciples had been pronouncing damnation.

But most significant of all in the biblical witness is Luke 6:20-26 where we find Jesus speaking the Beatitudes. "Happy are the poor... blessed are the weak." Blessed and happy. How nice. God loves the poor and the weak. God smiles upon them, giving them a kindly touch.

But the word found in the original Greek text is "makarios," a much more robust word than a tender smile or touch. A twentieth century Spanish translation of this word uses the adjective "bienaventurado," which literally means "good adventure." "Good adventure to you poor and weak. You are on the good adventure in which you will meet God who has ventured into this world." Other scholars suggest that "makarios" be translated "you are where you ought to be, where you would want to be if you are thinking straight....you are with God. You will discover the joy of heaven now."

But then abruptly Jesus speaks of WOE. "Woe to you who are rich

and sated and laughing and publicly acclaimed.” Woe! The Greek word “ouai” is the exact opposite of “makarios.” You are not on God’s great adventure. You are in league with evil. You are not where you ought to be according to God’s original plan. You are in the place of damnation, but too amused, sated, and flattered to realize it.

There is gross injustice in the world. How would we expect a passionate God to respond? What feelings must the God of boundless love have toward the tens of thousands of persons who die each and every day from preventable disease, illness, hunger or injury? Must not God’s passion for “the least of these our brethren” put God in opposition to those who are part of the oppression?

Gandhi spoke of the collision between need and greed. How does a prophet for the Lord speak to this in our day? The prophet must condemn! But can one con-demn without naming damnation?

I would like to hear or read the rest of Pastor Wright’s excerpted sermons. If his only message was damnation, then congregants and clergy colleagues and defenders of the USA may challenge him over the content of his homilies. But I am sure that he said much more than that God had every right to damn us for the above named sins. I’ve seldom heard a black preacher preach for less than thirty minutes, let alone thirty seconds.

Surely Pastor Wright also proclaimed that the kingdom of God is more powerful than our American empire and that God is able to work justice for the oppressed of the world, including justice for those oppressed by the policies and power of the USA.

I trust that he also announced God’s grace and redemption...even for oppressors such as we are. He just might, however, have saved that for later in the sermon, or even for a subsequent sermon (giving the Holy Spirit more time to work true

repentance in the hearts of oppressors).

Furthermore, no Christian sermon would be complete without preaching resurrection, proclaiming that God has complete power over death – the death which comes at us from every side, the death which we deal upon one another, and even the death which our Creator has every right to bring down on us for our sin. (Though God slay us, God's promise of grace and resurrection is our only hope.)

If Pastor Wright does not preach resurrection and grace and the coming reign of God, then have at him, fire away. Judgment and hope are inseparable in biblical prophetic tradition. But do not malign him for making THE JUDGMENT OF GOD the first order of business in his sermon.

Rev. Ted Schroeder, Kansas City, MO

Here are "big brother Ed's" thoughts on the matter. [Ted's 71, I'm 77.]

I voted for Obama in the Missouri primary election a short while ago. But when he chose to diss [Webster: to find fault with, to criticize] his pastor in the past few days, it made me wonder if I'll ever do it again. I'd hoped Obama might have had his own Aha! about Jeremiah Wright's "political preaching" and practice the "change" that he himself preaches, before his big, big speech this past Tuesday in Philadelphia,. But he violated his own mantra. He did not change.

He did not change–

not merely his critique of his pastor's "political preaching," but even more, he did not change his own head and heart to see that Wright's preaching—at least as much of it as I've seen hyped in the media—that Wright's preaching is the Word of God.

It must be divine whimsy that Obama's pastor is a "Jeremiah." He is doing a godly service to the people of America, just as his namesake did to the ancient people of Israel. And the reception these two Jeremiahs got was also the same. In neither case did the audience thank them for their efforts.

Jeremiah Wright is calling for change. Change, big time. In the Bible the verb is "repent!" Turn around. It was the prophet Jeremiah's word to his people. Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel, Isaiah and all the rest of them. Also John the Baptizer's word to his people. Also Jesus's word to his people. Change, change, change.

For all the change that Obama is calling for—and his chronicle of needed changes in America in that Tuesday speech was brilliant and Ciceronian in its oratory—he's blinded to the change that Jeremiah Wright is calling for. And Wright is not making this up on his own. His claim is simply that this is the change the God of the Bible is calling for. It's the change/repentance that the "Trinity" God [=the very name of Obama's congregation!] always calls for in every nation that assumes imperial pretensions and in the process fails its divine assignment to be God's care-taker for its own people. Remember the tower of Babel-builders, remember Pharaoh and Egypt, remember Goliath and the Philistines, remember Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. Remember... remember... remember.

This topic came up in a Bible class at (ugh!) 7 a.m. in our congregation this very Tuesday morning before Obama's speech. We're actually studying Matthew's Gospel. We're in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus himself moves toward a Jeremiah-mode. Comment from one: "So what Rev. Wright says may well be true, but why does he have to say it with such inflammatory language? It's just not smart. He'll lose many more folks than he'll win." "Yup," said another, "It's happened before. With the

first Jeremiah, with John the Baptist whom we just studied, and with Jesus here on the mount. Can you think of a nice way to say God is damning America?"

How can you NOT rile people up when you claim that God is telling them to "Change!" And with God's call to change there is the ominous "or else." Obama "condemns" his pastor's "incendiary language" about our nation. Then he'll have to reject the equally incendiary language of the Bible about "the nations." Wright is "just" quoting the Bible. It's God who says "Burn, baby, burn" to the unrighteous five "cities on the Plain"—two of them Sodom and Gomorrah—in Genesis 19. "The LORD rained sulfur and fire on the cities of the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground." Next morning Abraham got up early and "looked toward all the land of the Plain and saw the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace." Incendiary indeed, with God holding the matches.

Come on, Obama, your pastor is simply asking you to listen to "all" of God's words coming from the Holy Scriptures, not just the one "p.c." passage you quote in your Philadelphia speech, a passage that will never get anybody riled up: "that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us." Nothing incendiary there. Nor any fire therein that will move anyone to actually make it happen.

Hearts have to change before even that p.c. passage has a chance of fulfillment. Change of heart = repentance. "Change" is your mantra. Well then

That is the maxi-change that your pastor is calling for. If you can't see/hear that his words are coming from the same God you trust and worship at Trinity UCC, then at this point you are NOT for the change needed to make all the other changes you call for even imaginable. And then this too—you are sadly no

different (un-changed) from the other political candidates competing with you in wooing us.

So if you, Obama, really want to “save” America, save America from our most deadly threat, you’ll have to eat crow, admit that Pastor Wright is right. He’s right when he says that the “God-sized” problem confronting America is not the problems—yes, they are real, they are humongous—that you list several times in your Philadelphia speech. The God-sized problem confronting America is God. Jeremiah Wright, though he probably doesn’t know this, is saying exactly what Luther said in the face of the Muslim crusade into Europe in his day. “There are two enemies now at war with Holy Roman Empire. One is the military enemy on the ground outside the gates of Vienna. The other is God. Unless our ‘God-problem’ gets solved, we’re guaranteed losers with all the other problems.” Luther’s proposed solution for the God-problem is repentance, a.k.a., change. Change big time.

Here are your very words on Tuesday:

1. “Reverend Wright’s comments were not only wrong but divisive, divisive at a time when we need unity.” Yes, they were divisive, as were Jesus’ words too when he called for repentance-change. “I have come not to bring peace, but a sword.” Indeed unity is needed, but what you patently do not see—and your pastor does—is what the big “disunity” is. The big disunity afflicting America, as your pastor is telling you and all of us, is the “dividing wall of hostility” as Paul calls it, between God and an errant people. Your pastor IS calling for unity at THIS divisive wall, this mega-split between God and America. At the simplest level that is what the word “damn” means—the dividing wall of hostility between God and sinners, and the inevitable consequences that follow.

But you seem not to see what he sees. And Bible preacher that he is, he's saying: "If we don't get this wall torn down all the unity talk from politicians—yours included, Obama—is just baloney. The Bible says so."

2. *"The reverend's voice [Reverend Wright] . . . I heard . . . at the foot of the cross . . . the story of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh, the Christians in the lion's den, Ezekiel's field of dry bones. Those stories—of survival, and freedom, and hope—became our story, my story."Great. But have you forgotten what David, Moses, Daniel, Ezekiel actually did and said—how they got into trouble—in these episodes of the Scriptures that gave you hope? Their words were incendiary in the ears of their opponents. But God was on their side and not on the side of Goliath, Pharaoh, et al. Obama, change! Make THAT part of the story your story too. And then tell us THAT story. At present it's unlikely that you'll have any competition from Hillary or McCain on that one. You're the one who could do it. Here's another Bible word for you: "Who knows? Perhaps you have been called to the kingdom for just such as time as this."*
3. *"The mistake that Reverend Wright made in his offending sermons about America. . . . comments that are simply inexcusable."Come on, Obama, either David, Moses, Daniel, Ezekiel—yes, Jesus too—are your heroes, or they are not. And if they are, then Jeremiah Wright is NOT mistaken, nor are his comments "inexcusable." Instead of ancient Jeremiah, he's now Ezekiel (on your heroes list). Remember God's "threat" to Ezekiel: "I have made you a sentinel. You shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked 'You shall surely die,' [sounds pretty close to God himself saying "damn," doesn't it?] and you give them no warning . . . in order to save their life,*

they shall die for their iniquity, BUT their blood I will require of your hand.” Mistake? Inexcusable? You’ve got to stop saying that.

- 4. One more. “Profound mistake of Reverend Wright’s sermons . . . is that he spoke as if our society is static . . . still irrevocably bound to a tragic past. But what we know – what we have seen – is that America can change. That is the true genius of our nation.” Again, Obama, you’re not listening to your pastor. The change he’s calling for is biblical change, mega-turnaround on the God-interface. To this date our nation always thinks of itself as sinless. We are by definition “godly.” that’s why God always (rightly) blesses America. We deserve it. Mini-boo-boos, maybe. Maybe! But major faults? No way! And surely no faults so major that God might even say: “Bless America? You’ve got to be kidding. How blind are you? Can’t you see that right now I’m NOT blessing America? Where do you think these ever-lengthening laundry lists of problems (problems you will NOT solve) are coming from? Whose hand?*

Read the Pharaoh story again. Pharaoh never solved any of the ten “problems” I inflicted on the Egyptians. If I am NOT blessing America, how do you have thechutzpah to promise to solve any of the plagues I’ve been sending your way? With possibly more to come, unless you . . . “Change!”“ .

America IS indeed static, Obama. Ossified at one primal point—both primal and lethal. We never repent. That change we’ve never accomplished, although Lincoln actually got Congress to pass a resolution for national repentance in the midst of the Civil War. But after Appomattox the “true genius” of our nation returned. Our narcissistic genius at the God-interface reappeared. Like the Pharisees in Jesus’ day “We have

no need for repentance.” We are God’s chosen people. The reason God blesses America is because we do NOT need to change, nor should we. And to such “no need to repent” folks Jesus rails his “Woe!” for the entire chapter 23 of Matthew’s gospel.

“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” The words are straight from Jesus.

So, Obama, Change! Your pastor, you tell us, is the “man who brought you to the foot of the cross.” Good. It’s Holy Week. Good Friday is only hours away. That Christ on the cross is the grounds for all the change called for in the Christian faith. For me, for you too, to change. Change, yes, repent, turn away from this “other gospel,” the Folk Religion of God Bless America, rooted as it is in our nation’s blind conviction of our own sinlessness.

If the Jesus pitch is still a tad tough for you, maybe you could start with your pastor’s Old Testament namesake. Read some sections of Jeremiah of Jerusalem. ‘Course, you’ll soon see that he’s no less incendiary than Jesus is. And with all his incendiary critique of his godless nation, he (like Jesus) has words of hope (and that word “hope” peppers your prose). But this hope is REAL hope. It’s specked out in Jeremiah’s chapter 31, concluding in a “new covenant” where sinners get forgiven. Jesus actually quotes Jeremiah 31 in the Passion Week story that Christians will be re-enacting on Maundy Thursday, the Last Supper narrative. You know the punch-line: His own self–body and blood–“given for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

But to be the beneficiary of such God-sized forgiveness of sins, you have to be a sinner. And you have to say yes to the fact that you are–not that that is a prerequisite of being forgiven, but that without repentance you’ll never come to

trust the sin-forgiver.

A recent quote from you, Obama, says "Reverend Wright preached the gospel of Jesus, a gospel on which I base my life." I urge you NOT to change from that confession, but to change—yes, change indeed— to see that Reverend Wright's diagnosis of the sickness of America is precisely the malady that the gospel of Jesus heals. You base you life on it, you say. Great confession. Don't stop. But do open your eyes to the full picture. Your pastor has the flashlight needed for all of us to see what God sees in the dark corners of our dear people and country. Don't shut your eyes when he turns it on.

*Sincerely yours,
Edward H. Schroeder*

P.S. You might begin your next speech this way.

I've had an Aha! since that speech in Philadelphia. An Aha! to the deeper message that Rev. Wright, my pastor, has been proclaiming. Shakespeare put words into one of his character's mouth that apply to me: "Methinks I did protest too much." I suspect I've lots of company in mis-listening to what Reverend Wright's been saying. I wasn't listening deeply enough to my pastor. He is really on my side. Change is his big word,. Change is my big word. He's been calling for MEGA change in America. I've been focusing on big changes in America too, but not on the scale that Rev. Wright is calling for. Yet the two are closely connected.

Rev. Wright's been calling for change in America for all the years that I've known him. It's a MEGA change, a change addressing the God-problem confronting our nation. He's taking it right out of the Bible—both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures. We couldn't be having all this trouble in our nation, all these problems, if we didn't have a God-

problem. That's what he's been saying, and I think he's right. John and Hillary and I too have been debating the big changes needed down-on-the-ground in our land. We've been focusing on the down-on-the-ground problems confronting all of us—as we should be. That's the calling of a politician.

But Rev. Wright is reminding us of another problem. America's God-problem. Not our problem with God, but God's problem with us.

It's been a long time since that got any serious attention in American politics, but it did once get national attention—from one of our greatest presidents, Abraham Lincoln. Right in the middle of the Civil War Lincoln had the courage to tell our nation that God was not pleased with America, that our self-destroying war, though willfully entered into by North and South, was God giving us our come-uppance for our past misdeeds. And the immensity of the bloodshed of that war signalled the immensity of the “sin” of the nation. So what did he do? He not only proposed repentance, but succeeded in getting Congress – imagine that!—to declare a day of national repentance in the very midst of that brother-killing-brother Civil War.

Even though Lincoln was Republican (ahem!), the first-ever Republican president of the US, I gladly call on him as precedent for this new plank in my “Change” platform. If McCain wants to appropriate his fellow Republican Lincoln too, fine. And Hillary is welcome too. We can then debate if Lincoln's repentance message then is still today's message from the “God we trust.” I think my pastor's on target. His message is a message from the “God we trust.” So we've got to pay attention to it – or else. Whether or not Hillary and John agree with that diagnosis of our national problems, I don't know. But I propose this Lincolnesque topic for conversation among the

three of us and above all for our conversation with the people of America as we move toward November. It's fundamentally about our national security, security with a capital "S."