

The Crossings Family Tree: A Third Generation.

Colleagues,

Five years ago today, March 13, 2003 Bob Bertram died. Bob is the father of Crossings, the patriarch. Y'all know that. But now it looks as though he's become a Crossings grandfather. How so? Well, if we designate you folks on the listserve (many of you his actual students) as the "children," there's now evidence that from you is coming a third generation. To remember Bob on this fifth anniversary of his final "crossing," here's evidence that your generation is producing offspring, a third generation of Crossings kids.

Pasted below is a letter recently sent to "Mom," one of Bob's early Crossings students—and a continuing Crossings junkie. "Son" sounds like he's got the same theological DNA, a chip of the old block, a next generation branch of the Crossings family tree. In daily life Son is a US Naval officer. Submarines. When he surfaces from the briny deep and heads for shore, he's on land at a naval base. Nearby is a Lutheran congregation where he shows up for worship. Not long ago he bemoaned to his mom the "Christ-less" sermons coming his way. So she egged him on to do something about it. And he did. Mom passed the correspondence on to me. And now I to you. Proper names are encoded, but the message isn't. See for yourself. Read on.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Mom, below is what I wrote to my Pastor. Thought you might like to read it. Love you and thanks for your help.

LK

Dear Pastor J,

As we chatted after church, I mentioned I'd drop you an email to further our introductions. So, briefly about me: I am native of St. Louis from a family that, despite its Missouri locale, is affiliated with the ELCA. With two Lutheran pastors for grandfathers and their respective wives sharing the same name, I grew up thinking every old man was a minister and every grandma was an old lady named M. Both conclusions I still stand by. After high school I went to the Naval Academy for college where I attended St Mark Lutheran Church in Annapolis, MD. Since graduating, I've moved five times in the last four years so I've become somewhat of a professional church shopper. I moved to this area about two years ago and, after once again finishing my church sampling, am very excited about becoming a part of the St. X community.

You and Pastor T have truly created a church environment welcoming to visitors and thus primed to grow. Each member warmly introduces themselves to new faces they don't recognize, the people are excited about the church, and the music is a refreshing reminder of how great Lutheran music can be (Wednesday's evening prayer was so beautiful I was nearly in tears). It is obvious the St. X's community is well schooled in, and eager about, growth.

And growing it certainly must be doing. It was pretty much standing room only today at second service. When I saw how crowded the church was, I begrudgingly thought it must be Confirmation Sunday and I was thus in for a long one. What other Sunday, other than Christmas and Easter, would make the place so full? A unique and exciting church you have. One thing about the services, however, has troubled me the last couple of

times I've attended. The sermons the past couple of weeks have lacked Christ in such a way that I feel I must risk arrogance and say something about it. Martin Luther wrote the purpose of the sermon is to necessitate Christ. The good news of the gospel, the sweet exchange of condemnation for our sin for Christ's righteousness is such good news that it needs to be shared every week.

When I imagined myself today as a first time visitor to the church, having never heard the gospel, I don't think I would have gotten that message today. In fact, I think the only time Christ was mentioned in the sermon was in reference to his temptations portrayed in a movie. The message I got today was to be a better person, share with others, win and lose with grace, and to ultimately live a better life by following these rules and avoiding certain pitfalls. But, if I can't do it, don't worry about it, "it could be worse."

I understand that we are in Lent, and since this is a time for self-reflection we need to hold off for a while on the resurrection. True, but this time in reflection, and thus concentration on the law, should ultimately lead us to the hopelessness of our situation without Christ. It felt like you were giving a seminar on rules and laws that, if followed, would result in God rewarding us with a fulfilling life in which we find our mission.

But doing this is simply impossible. We can't live up to God. The Law is tough. It's harsh. It's just. And it's impossible to fulfill. If we try to live up to it, we'll find ourselves hating ourselves, and God, much like Luther did before his great revelation. This is the point of Lent. Honest self-reflection that screams the need for a savior. We should be dying for Easter to come and rejoicing in the knowledge that it will.

Today, I got some good advice for living a better life with, or without, Christ our Savior. The good news of Christianity is that Christ frees us from the law. We no longer have to worry about trying to make God, or ourselves, happy by avoiding hazards to our mission. Instead, we may rejoice in the righteousness Christ gives to us. This is good news. This is why being a Christian is the only true way to find happiness. This needs to be shared. This needs to be repeated.

And so I write hoping not to criticize, but to share what has saddened me recently. I look forward to getting to know you better, to your response, and to continuing to enjoy the loving atmosphere of St. X's you and Pastor T have so expertly built.

Warmly Yours,
LK

[Pastor J responded. LK passed that response on to Mom, and she to ES, and now ES to you. Do you think Pastor J heard what LK was saying? Is he in synch with the Augsburg Aha?]

LK,

Thanks for writing and giving me your feedback on my sermon today. I always appreciate feedback and look forward to getting to know you better in the days ahead.

I try to give a response to your comments and hope we can talk about this face-to-face in the near future. For Lent this year we are using the Ortberg [Ed: Google that name to learn more] to spur discussion on lifestyle and priorities we have. Since you were there on Wednesday night and heard my homily you know where my heart is, to bring Christ to those who have not heard or accepted him as Lord and Christ. I often say we are dealing with the eternal destiny of people and nothing can be more important. The law always drives us to our knees in the

recognition we need a Savior and the Gospel brings us the Good News that that Savior is Jesus who died and rose for us.

I do not feel that every sermon needs to make that point directly. Sermons can also address how we live our Christian life. God has created us for a purpose and the first purpose is that we were created for worship. We recite the Creed every week which proclaims our faith and the role of Jesus. The sermon tries to explain the Scripture lessons for the week both historically and how they apply to our lives today. I do not believe that everything depends on the sermon for that message to be heard. The hymns and songs we sing, the liturgy and the prayers all are part of the worship experience and, I believe, are used by the Holy Spirit to drive us to our knees and raise us up through the Gospel.

Before coming to St X, I was a chaplain in an institutional context. One of the reasons I left that chaplaincy was hinted at last week when I talked about living lives of integrity. I was not free to proclaim Christ in the way I wanted and felt I needed to return to the parish where I could proclaim "Christ has died. Christ is Risen. Christ will come again!"

I really appreciate your comments and will take them to heart as I prepare sermons in the future. Palm Sunday we hear the entire Passion story which is the heart of the New Testament. I hope you will be able attend Holy Week services as I think you will hear the power of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection as Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life and no one comes to the Father except through him.

LK, thanks for writing. I would love to find a time when we could have lunch together or just visit some to get to know each other better. What is your schedule like and when are you usually free?

Hope to see you Wednesday if you are free. Perhaps we can find a time then to get together.

*In Christ,
Pastor J*

[This exchange brings to mind a line that Bob Bertram regularly hyped from Apology 4 of the Augsburg Confession. In speaking to the critics who faulted the Augsburgers for being “soft” on ethics and good works because of their constant drumbeat of “faith alone,” Melanchthon’s rejoinder (paragraph 188) is that our pastors and teachers do indeed praise good works, but in a very specific way: “They praise good works in such a way as not to lose the Gospel’s free promise.” Question: Does Pastor J’s response do likewise? ES]

The Augsburg Aha! – Church and Secular Authority (AC 14-16, 23, 26-28)

Colleagues,

Here’s the next-to-last installment of class handouts that Ron Neustadt and I are using with students in Springfield, Illinois for the course on the Augsburg Confession of 1530. One more still to come: Human Will and Human Works (AC 6, 17-21). And after that the take-home Final Exam!

Peace and Joy!

CHURCH AND SECULAR AUTHORITY

AUGSBURG CONFESSION 14 Order in the Church

“Order” here signals ordination. We do not approve of self-appointed “public preachers or teachers.” They should be “rightly called” by existing church authorities.

CONFUTATION 14

Right! Now please stick to that commitment

APOLOGY 14

But it’s tough when many of the current bishops (the folks authorized to “rightly call” pastors for our parishes) refuse to do so because our pastoral candidates now are “gospel-grounded” in their theology. [They’re alumni of Wittenberg University!] “When bishops compel our priests either to reject and to condemn the kind of doctrine that we have confessed, or by new and unheard of cruelty they kill the unfortunate and innocent people,” then we must find other ways of carrying out our commitment to “rightly call” pastors. These bishops are destroying the church by blocking Gospel-grounded pastors. We have a clear conscience on this matter, for Christians have a “right”—a Christ-given right—to be nurtured by Gospel-grounded pastors. So we devise other ways to carry out this rubric of “rightly call.” “Let the bishops ask themselves how they will give an answer to God for breaking up the church.”

AC 15 Church Rites, Church Regulations

Any practice is OK if a) it doesn’t burden consciences, and b) isn’t contrary to the Gospel. In the final sentence a third reason is given for the danger of rites and regulations, namely, that people turn these practices into means for self-

justification. It's that Adamic "opinio legis" at work. These traditions "through which people imagine they can earn grace and make satisfaction for sin are good for nothing and contrary to the gospel."

CONFUTATION15

Although the first part of AC 15 is OK, that final sentence above "is completely rejected. For it is false [to say] that human ordinances instituted to placate God and make satisfaction for sin are against the Gospel."

APOLOGY 15

[If you've been doing this "Augsburg-theology-course" from the beginning, you could write Melanchthon's response yourself.] "We never dreamed . . . that they would openly Judaize and openly supplant the gospel with the teaching of demons." Then follows a long list—pages and pages—of church practices that must be removed because they fail the test specified in AC 15. They do indeed place new burdens upon the consciences of Christians, and they are contrary to the Gospel. Over and over again as these practices are commended to believers, "Christ is obscured." When people think they are worshipping God by performing such rites, they need to hear that "the chief worship of God is to preach [and then believe] the Gospel."

AC 16 Civil Affairs, Civil Government [God at work in the secular world]

[Preliminary note: When Americans hear the word "government," they immediately think of politics. Not so for the German and Latin titles of AC 16 – "weltliches Regiment" and "de rebus civilibus." First one means "any exercise of authority out in the world." That includes parents, school teachers, traffic cops, judges, "managers" of all kinds—at home, on the farm, in the workplace, at the office—and finally political leaders too.

Second one means “anything pertaining to citizens.” That’s everything that comes with living out in the world, the same laundry list just mentioned. The contrast is NOT between church and state, but between what God is doing in the “old” creation (where God’s law with its “you gotta, or else...” is the authority in charge—call it “coercive” authority) and what God is doing in Christ’s “new” creation (where the “authority” of the forgiveness of sins, call it “promise,” runs the show). “Fairness” and “forgiveness” are the opposite “nickel words” for these 2 different sorts of authority. Though these 2 terms are very different from one another, yes, conflicting, God’s authority “author”izes both of them.]

AC 16 says:

All good and lawful work in the world [not just “church” work] is good and godly—even a “just” war. The Christians groups [such as the Anabaptists] who say Christians should not be involved in such worldly work—because it’s the devil’s realm, not God’s regime—are wrong. The Gospel does not destroy the “good” that God is doing in the non-church world. The world (because there are now sinners there) needs to be “preserved.” God has “ordained” [=created] such secular structures [“ordinances”] to do such preserving work in the world.

CONFUT 16.

We have no problem with AC 16.

APOLOGY 16.

The confutators say they agree with AC 16, but take a closer look. Para. 2. Our theology here is based on an important distinction: Christ’s kingdom, and the kingdoms (structures) in the political world. [Greek word “polis,” at the root of the word “political” (and of “police!”) means first of all “the city, human society,” not merely “politics”]. This distinction is based on the distinction between Law and Gospel which is at

the center of AC/Apol 4.

Para. 3. Yet even in Reformation times, some folks [e.g., Carlstadt, Luther's colleague at Wittenberg University] said all secular structures are ungodly. They said we must remove all these structures and replace them with structures grounded on the Gospel. But that cannot be done. Gospel & faith work in people's hearts. It's only human beings who can be "grounded in the Gospel." Even if you wanted to, you cannot make society's structures Gospel-grounded. Why not? It's impossible. Societies have no "heart," the organ needed to trust the Gospel. The Gospel is at work only in believers. Not everybody in society is a believer. So you can't make the Gospel the organizing principle for such a society, even if you did try. It won't work. The Gospel is never coercive. God's law at work in the world is always coercive. It always comes with an "or else." When the Gospel is made coercive, it's no longer Gospel.

Para. 6. Past enemies of the Gospel have also said that the Gospel wants to destroy structures of secular society. But such people—Julian, Celsus—understood neither the Gospel, nor what God is doing in secular society when they said that. The Gospel does not replace the godly "law-grounded" ordinances of civil society.

Para. 9. Christian perfection (leading a holy life) does not call us to run away from godly work in secular society. The whole monastic movement is based on this idea that saying no to normal life in secular society is God's preferred form of Christian life. That idea is just plain wrong with its notions of poverty (cannot have money) and celibacy (not to marry is holier than to marry) as God's preferred pattern for Christian life.

Para. 13 Many Christians working in the secular world have

“testified how they were helped” by this theology “after the theories of the monks had troubled them and put them in doubt whether the Gospel permitted such public and private business.”

AC 23 Married Pastors.

Again, there is no Bible word that says pastors must be unmarried. And in the N.T. they were. Also in the early history of the church. “Required” celibacy for pastors came very late in Western church history. That was not the case in churches of the East.

CONFUT 23

The church can change the rules and did so after many years of married pastors. At the center of the argument is the Augustinian view of sex. Sex is always sinful.

APOL 23

Church cannot change the rules that contradict the NT. Sex is a gift from God, not sinful in itself. When it is sinful it is because sinners take something good from God and use it for sinful purposes.

AC 26 The Distinction of Foods

Three things are wrong about all the rules and regs on fasting, required ceremonies, etc. 1) they obscure Christ and his Gospel, 2) they obscure the genuine commands of God, which tell what works God himself wants us to be doing, 3) they burden consciences, since nobody can keep all the requirements. They are “diametrically opposed to, in conflict with, the Gospel.” So “the Gospel compels us” to disobey them.

CONFUT 26

“What AC 26 says must be rejected.” Why? 1. All power is from God. God has given his power to the church. Therefore what the church decrees should be obeyed. 2. The Bible says so: “Obey them that have the rule over you and submit.” 3. Therefore you

princes and cities (who submitted the AC) be warned: If you disobey church authority, your subjects will learn to disobey you. 4. Faith is not obscured by such ordinances, nor is the Gospel obscured. 5. It's false to say that no one can keep them all. Would Mother Church be such a cruel mother – commanding us to do things that are impossible to do? 6. The church forbids certain things about food, "as an easier way to keep God's commandments." The freedom which the confessors hype is "alien to the faith and discipline of the Church."

APOL 26

The Apology makes no response to the Confutation on this one.

AC 27 Monastic Vows

Monasticism has a very checkered history. The early associations were commendable, but things went downhill fast. Insiders know what goes on in the monasteries these day. Not good. Worst of all, though, is the "kind of pseudo-Gospel" that arose with monasticism: 1) that monastic vows were equal to baptism as a means of grace, and (then later) even better than baptism. 2) Thus monks were considered superior to "normal" Christians. Their vows gave them more merits than Christians had who stayed in their callings in the world. 3. The monastic mandate to sexual continence contradicts God's own command that men and women marry, contradicts the sex drives that God created. 4. Before God monastic vows, made to merit justification and grace, are void because they "detract from the glory of Christ, obscure and deny the righteousness of faith." 5. Monasticism feeds an "invented" notion of Christian perfection, contrary to what genuine Christian perfection is. And what is that? Here are the specs: "fear and trust in God through Christ...diligence in good works for others and attending to our callings" out in the secular world. 6. Summa: "Inasmuch as all these things are false, useless, and invented, monastic vows are null and void." Period!

CONFUT 27

"All things must be rejected which in this article have been produced against monasticism." A typical statement: "Monks endeavor to live more nearly to the Gospel, that they may merit [sic!] eternal life. Therefore what has here been charged against monasticism is wicked."

APOL 27

Melanchthon's 13-page response to the Confutation here is one that you students by now could write yourselves. It's justification-by-faith-alone all over again. He cannot refrain from calling them some uncomplimentary names (which, of course, you students would never do). Sample: "The whole monastic system is full of counterfeits, so they quote passages of Scripture under false pretenses." (22:44) On such quoting of the Bible: Bible passages "ought to be interpreted according to the rule, that is, according to the sure and clear passages of Scripture, not against the rule or the(se) passages. It is a sure thing that our observances do not merit the forgiveness of sins or justification." Monasticism as practiced in our day fails the test of being Christian, since it cannot be fitted into the Gospel-hub of the wheel of faith.

AC 28 Authority and Power of Bishops.

Great controversy. Bishops have confused the two "powers" that God has put into the world: the power of the church (Gospel) and the power of the sword (law). Confusion comes because the bishops' power is not seen "according to the Gospel." All the power that bishops have is for Gospel-related things. The only source for that power is the Gospel itself. When bishops do use coercive power to enforce churchly rules and regulations: 1.they are acting contrary to the gospel, 2.they burden consciences, 3.they destroy Christian liberty, 4.they imply that their rules are necessary for justification, 5.they dishonor Christ. And if that last one is not enough, there

comes this: Even the rules made by the apostles in the NT are changeable if they do any of the 5 items mentioned above. How so? Melanchthon gives some examples.

CONFUT. 28

The confutators make no distinction between the two “powers.” The authority to “require” some behavior of people and the authority to “offer” forgiveness are the same “juridical” authority a bishop possesses. Thus coercive power is part of a bishop’s authority—especially when someone’s salvation is at stake. In refusing to acknowledge the juridical authority of bishops the Augsburg Confessors are ignoring the clear Biblical mandate “Obey your leaders” (Hebrews 13:17).

APOLOGY 28

Repeats AC 28. When the Confutators call the Augsburgers to “obey your leaders,” Apol. 28 responds: “This statement requires obedience to the Gospel; it does not create an authority for bishops apart from the Gospel. Bishops must not create traditions contrary to the Gospel, nor interpret traditions in a manner contrary to the Gospel. When they do so, we are forbidden to obey them by the statement (Galatians 1:8), ‘If anyone preaches another Gospel, let him be accursed.’”

For class discussion: In your church today—what would a “bishop according to the Gospel” do? What would such a bishop not do?

Robert W. Bertram “A Time for

Confessing”

Colleagues,

ThTh 507 is a shameless promotion piece for Bob Bertram’s book. For your sake, not for his. Two weeks from today is already the fifth anniversary of his death. His royalties are a done deal. So hustling his book is not for him. Here’s why to buy. What Wm. B. Eerdmans has published in “A Time for Confessing” is more than just one book. It’s a Bertram library.

Although the cover says: “A Time for Confessing,” that title covers only the first 150 pages. Then comes an additional 55 pages that Eerdmans calls an “appendix.” Appendix shmendix! Those 55 pages are actually another book, the second of three books still in Bob’s computer at his departure. But that second one existed only in theses format—365 (sic!) of them—paragraph-long theses each longing for full-page exposition. The bones and sinews are there. Readers will have to flesh them out on their own. But that’s not as impossible as it might first seem. For after you’ve read the first 150 pages, Bob’s own enfleshment of his six fundamental theses for “A Time for Confessing,” you just might get the hang of it.

And as if that were not enough, there follows the icing on this double-layered cake, editor Mike Hoy’s ten full pages listing 189 items—essays, presentations, book reviews, articles and sermons—collected in Manila folders of Bob’s filing cabinets. Dear Thelda Bertram and Mike have been working through that mountain of stuff during this past five years. If these words of mine were really a hype for anybody, it would be for Michael Hoy. Weeks and weeks of Mike’s life are layered between the covers of this “liber” of love. All of it done “on the side” as Mike carried out his double calling of pastor and theology prof among us here in St. Louis, lo, these many years. [Mike’s dear

to us here in town. So don't any of you try to steal him. However, on second thought, Bob always did make a point that God worked on the "Platzregen principle," moving his Gospel thunder-shower around from one place to the other—irrespective of how church strategists sought to manage things. Mike's a pro when it comes to the Platzregen.]

But I digress. At the "el cheapo" price that <Amazon.com> is still listing (\$19.80) you get two books presenting Bob's life's work in theology. First one, theology as an act of confessing (six case studies), and the second one, Bob slugging it out with the academic theologians of his own lifetime. Its title: "Postmodernity's CRUX: A Theology of the Cross for the postmodern World." Acronymn-addicted as Bob was, each of those capital letters are chapter headings: C is for Criticism, R is for Revelation, U is for Universality, X is for Christ-ening.

Before Eerdmans decided to print the two of them together, they'd asked me to do a Foreword for the first one, which does now appear in the "fore" of this book. To tease you into buying and reading this Bertram library (220 pages total), I'll post the original Foreword-text that I sent to Eerdmans as this week's ThTh offering. [They "improved" my text here and there in what finally got into print. So perhaps what's here below is not technically copyrighted, but I'm not going to ask.]

Peace and Joy!
Ed Schroeder

Bob Bertram is perhaps the most unpublished major Lutheran theologian of the 20th century. When I say "unpublished," I mean he never wrote a book—though there were three book-length manuscripts in his computer when he breathed his last. So it's high time, even now post mortem, that we his students, his

“living letters,” do something about it—at the very least with those three manuscripts. Unpublished, of course, doesn’t mean un-public. Bob theologized “in public” for all his adult life. [We have no information about his early childhood.] Where my life intersected Bob’s theology “in public” was well over half a century ago (1949) in the classroom at Valparaiso University. He was a Young Turk prof, age 28, and I was just young at 18. My baccalaureate major was philosophy and that’s where Bob was teaching—alongside colleagues Jaroslav Pelikan and Richard Luecke, equally youngish and possibly even more Turkish. At Valparaiso in those days, university and church politics being what they were, serious theology was being taught in the philosophy department. This trio of hot-shots (also competent philosophers for the required courses) were hustling theology under such camouflage titles as Recent Religious Philosophies, Representative Christian Thinkers or Philosophy of Christian Theology. And all this in a university linked to the Missouri Synod!

In the rest of that half-century Bob moved on to the classrooms (and intra-churchly conversations) of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Christ Seminary-Seminex (ditto), the Crossings Community (ditto) and a concluding decade at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

So there are thousands of us living letters. But we’re not the only public for whom he theologized, though he probably honed his distinctive teaching method with us regulars who appeared before him several times a week for a whole semester. At one Seminex commencement a graduating senior, saying thanks to each faculty member, identified Bob’s own version of Socrates’ method thus: “And to Blessed Bob Bertram, who always took us on the scenic route. Yet if we paid attention, we did get to the destination just before the bell rang.”

Bob had publics beyond the classroom. "On journeyings often," he put his theology out in public—at conferences of all sorts, church consultations, presentations at professional academic meetings, with the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the USA Lutheran – Catholic Dialogue, his long years as co-chair of ITEST [Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology]. The Crossings web-page <www.crossings.org> has archived almost 100 of these "Works of RWBertram."

Not that his theology never got into print. Some of these essays did get published in Festschriften, conference proceedings and random journals. But Bob never got around to putting a string of them together into a book by the time he died at 82 years old in March 2003. Not that he didn't have that in mind. Thus these three major manuscripts in his computer. One reason for them staying in the computer—so some of us think—was his perfectionism. No version of a frequently-revised chapter was quite good enough. So he would tweak it and try it out again on a new audience the next time he was asked to speak. But even that re-tweaked version needed more tweaking.

Such "self-doubt" that his prose was good enough even plagued Bob's doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago. Not till 1963 (at age 42) did Bob hand it in to his committee (Paul Tillich and Jaroslav Pelikan) and get the degree after 15-plus years of "working on it." I remember hearing Pelikan himself once say: "We told Bob, just hand in the Chicago telephone directory, and we'll give you your degree!" Granted, it is a magnum opus, though not quite as big as the phonebook. Its title: "The Human Subject as the Object of Theology. Luther by Way of Barth." Its egghead-sounding agenda is "the grammar of theological predication."

One might say it set the direction for Bob's half century of public theologizing. Bob opens his case noting Karl Barth's complaint that the human-centeredness of modern theology, Feuerbach the arch-proponent thereof, but Schleiermacher too, came straight from Luther. Barth says, "Luther emphatically shifted the interest from what God is in himself to what God is for man." One might say that Barth's immense theological production was dedicated to correcting Luther's mistake. Well, Bob "cross-examines" Barth's challenge, waltzing his readers through pages and pages of exegesis of Luther's two great classic works—Bondage of the Will and Galatians Commentary—to show that Barth is actually correct. For Luther, theology is indeed about "what God is for man." But that is not to be lamented—pace Barth—but rather celebrated "for us and for our salvation."

One of Bob's dissertation chapters on Luther's own venture into the grammar of theological predication (heisted from Paul's Galatians) has generated a Bertram bon mot. In academic prose the issue is: How our sins (rightly predicated to us) become rightly predicated to Christ, and how Christ's righteousness (rightly predicated to him) rightly becomes predicated to us sinners. Bob's shortcut shibboleth for that was "the sweet swap," his American translation of Luther's classic "fröhlicher Wechsel." You can still hear it in the theological vocabulary of his students everywhere.

Bob's theological work might be seen as a lifelong set of variations on that cantus firmus. Over and over again he piped that tune—though largely unknown (or sung off-key) in modern theology (Lutheran or otherwise)—demonstrating its currency, its "winsomeness" (one of his favored terms) to us moderns as music to our ears.

Another phrasing for Luther's theological Aha! according to

Bob—both back in the 16th century and still today—is “the proper distinction between God’s law and God’s gospel.” Bob might already have learned that even before his years of Luther-probing at the University of Chicago. It could have been in his DNA. How so? His maternal grandfather, William H.T. Dau, had translated the Missouri Synod patriarch’s classic work into English: C.F.W. Walther’s “The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel.” Bob’s father, a Germanics prof, later translated Werner Elert’s dogmatics (where the law/gospel distinction is the fundamental axiom for Lutheran theology) into English. Though Bob could read and speak German—and didn’t need these translations—might such Lutheran theology have been transmitted at the family table (or even from mother’s milk)? We’ll never know.

Whatever its provenance, sweet-swap theology of the cross and law-gospel hermeneutics are what Bob was up to all the time. And for most of Bob’s subsequent teaching years I was not too far away.

After being his student in the late 1940s I returned as greenhorn instructor to Valparaiso University in the late fifties just as a “real” Theology Department had been finessed through university politics with Bob as the chair and thus my boss. There Bob led the department—some, not all—into a curricular venture grounded in this double axiom of sweet-swap and law-gospel. The ancient Latin proverb proved true for us: *docendo discimus*—by teaching we learned. And so did our students. They said so.

In 1963 Bob moved to Concordia Seminary, the Missouri Synod’s major seminary, as professor of systematic and historical theology. A few years later I was called to teach there too, and the hurricane brewing in the synod—substantively about this doublet of cross-theology and law-gospel lenses for reading the

Bible—soon made landfall. The consequence was Seminex, originally Concordia Seminary in Exile, where the expelled faculty and students recouped and lived out for ten years the cross-theology and Biblical hermeneutics that had so aggravated our antagonists.

Bob's final chapter in this volume takes that event as a "time for confessing" that we learned not from books, but from lived experience.

I'm convinced that were it not for Seminex, the chapters in this book would never have been written. Although Bob became the theological interpreter—for insiders and outsiders—of what was happening, it was not right away that he (nor we) got clarity on what was happening to us and on what we ourselves were doing.

One example was our understanding of the word "exile." Early on we thought it was linked to the Hebrew scriptures—the people of God exiled from their homeland, but anticipating "some day" to come back home again, home to Missouri. Then one day at morning devotions, senior professor "Doc" Caemmerer, pioneer Gospel-guru for most of us on the faculty when we were his students at Concordia Seminary, preached on the text of Hebrews 11, Abraham as an "exile" — a thousand years before the Babylonian captivity. Doc showed us that Abraham's exile was not "from a country to which he longed to return, but from a better country, one up ahead, where he'd never been before." Exile in the N.T. is not like exile in the O.T., returning to a place that once was home. Exile for Christians is heading toward a promised future, something brand new up ahead, "a city which God has prepared for them."

So looking back to Missouri soon faded into looking forward to something better. Even the ELCA, the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in America, that eventually came over the horizon, “better” for sure than the old homeland for Seminexers, is still a ways away from that city God has prepared.

But we didn’t come into exile with any consensus about it being a “time for confessing.” Partly that derived from the widespread ignorance for most of us about Article 10 of the Formula of Concord from 1577. We’d all learned in seminary that it was about that funny term, adiaphora, things neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture. It seemed to be ho-hum stuff. But had any of us learned that it REALLY was about coercive authority in the church and how cross-theology and law-promise hermeneutics are called to respond in such a time as this? I don’t remember anyone talking this way early on in our community. We hadn’t really caught what that article’s key Latin terms—tempus confessionis, status confessionis—were talking about. In a word, they were talking about us! Here’s how the title of this book came to be.

Three years into Seminex, 1977, was the 400th anniversary of the Formula of Concord. Bob gave a lecture—on Article 10—at a major conference celebrating the four centuries. In that essay he showed us that “times for confessing,” the first term, are crunch-moments in church history, not just everyday occasions for Christian witness. And the crunch is heightened in the second Latin term “status.” Said Bob, that means being on the witness-stand, on trial, out in public, before the authorities. You are in the dock, accused of “bad” faith and under orders to “fess up,” to testify (martyria in Greek, with the overtones included), seeking to show your critics that the faith they call bad is indeed the faith that Christ commends.

Where Bob first got wind of this in FC 10, I don’t know. My hunch is that it may have come through his depth probe into Bonhoeffer’s writings, and then early on in Seminex’s history

from the visit of Bonhoeffer's biographer and one-time student Eberhard Bethge to our community. There had been some talk among us before our cataclysm struck of an "exile seminary," and where any precedents might be. A few of us knew of Bonhoeffer's "exile" seminary hidden away in Finkenwalde during the Third Reich, and that prompted more serious investigation. We knew that our church opponents were a far cry from the Gestapo that threatened Finkenwalde—though now and then we wondered.

We learned from Bethge that—of all things!—FC 10 was fundamental to the confessing that Bonhoeffer himself learned—and did—during the time of the Third Reich. It was also a cornerstone piece of the Finkenwalde curriculum during Bethge's student days there. At a conference in 1984 commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Barmen Declaration, the anchor-piece of the Confessing Church in the Third Reich, someone asked Bethge if he'd ever experienced anything close to Finkenwalde since his own student days there. "Yes, once," he said, "at Seminex. Especially the singing, the singing!" Bob's chapter 5 shows what he learned about times for confessing from Bonhoeffer and from FC 10—and what he sought to show the rest of us.

Bob's paradigm, with its "six clues" for times for confessing, also got a boost in our core-course teaching in systematic theology at Seminex. In the final curriculum revision there were only two required courses in systematics. They were "Christian Confession: Classical," the ecumenical creeds and the confessing done at Augsburg, and "Christian Confession: Contemporary," 20th century movements beginning with the Confessing Church in Germany, our own experience in the Missouri Synod, and the confessing in liberation theology movements of our day. The "classical" and "contemporary" confessing examined in those two courses parallel the table of

contents of this book. Bob's six clues arise from these data.

The clue of "martyria" (chapters 1 and 2) comes from the classical confessions. "Adding items to the gospel"—Bob calls it "Gospel-plussing"—(chapter 3) took us to M.L. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail." South African confessors contra apartheid (chapter 4) signalled the ecumenical clue, confessing as an appeal to the whole church. Mis-aligned church authority is the clue Bob unpacks in chapter 5, the Bonhoeffer chapter. The Philippine confessing movement (chapter 6) is clued to "an appeal for and to the oppressed."

Bob's final chapter on "ambiguous certitude" is about us Missouri confessors. It was probably the last of the half dozen to come into focus, as Bob (and we all) kept trying to explain our actions to our friends, our well-meaning supporters. Many of them were the dear Missourians who kept us financially alive with nearly one million dollars coming our way during each of our 10 years of seminary in exile. But even as generous patrons they kept asking why "giving up the seminary campus" and letting ourselves get sacked—"You wouldn't have had to do that!"—was being "faithful to our calling and faithful to our Lord." What was certitude to us was highly ambiguous to them—and sometimes to us as well. Bob concludes the sextet with that look at ourselves at the end—not a bang, but not a whimper either. We didn't always know what we were doing.

Over and over again in this text you will hear Bob zeroing in on "the one Gospel-and-sacraments." He's taking that term from the Augsburg Confession (1530) where this one Gospel-and-sacraments, spelled out with its native New Testament substance, becomes the criterion for the yea and nay of these Augsburg confessors—all of them laymen!—in their own time on the witness stand.

It might appear that Bob's life's work in theology was largely inside the walls of the seminary and the church. "Au contraire" (as he himself liked to say, when we didn't get it) he was regularly out beyond those borders in conversation with (another favored phrase) "God's dear worldlings." See that list of his works on the Crossings webpage for examples outside the churchy envelope: Ethical Implications of Military Leadership, Church and Economic Order, How to be Technological, though Theological: An Answer for "Fabricated Man."

The last of those three comes from his quarter century as co-chair of ITEST, the Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology. His co-chair, Robert Brungs, SJ, was a boron-physicist. ITEST kept Bob constantly crossing his Lutheran theology not only with the Roman Catholic heritage of most of the ITEST members, but also with no-nonsense first-echelon international pros in science and technology.

Come to think about it, most of this book is really not confined to inner-churchly conversation, but unfolds out in the public arena, most often the conflictive public arena of politics—apartheid in South Africa, the Philippine revolution against Marcos, the struggle of the churches in Hitler's Third Reich, the American Civil Rights movement. And in every one Bob shows us Christians out there in the thick of it hearing and following Christ's call to take the witness stand.

In conclusion, two other items in this same genre of theology crossing the world "out there." The first was in-house in Seminex, but it addressed a strictly-speaking "secular" agenda: How to organize our communal life where "dear worldly" elements of finance, grades, hiring and firing, contracts, laws and municipal codes, responsibility and sanctions all are in play alongside (in, with, and under) the "one Gospel-and-sacraments" of our faith and worship life. Bob was chosen to compose our

“Internal Governance Document.” When Seminex began, there was no handbook; there wasn’t even a “mother church” to whom we belonged. So we started from scratch and—no surprise—Bob got the job. What he came up with was a tour-de-force of law-gospel architecture for our life together.

One plank in that Internal Governance actually came from the “regula” of the Dominican monastic order in the Middle Ages, to wit, their axiom that in the community “the decision-makers shall be the consequence-takers, and the consequence-takers shall be the decision-makers.” Our ancient tradition in Missouri had been “benign hierarchy.” Thus the governing board of Concordia Seminary were not trustees, but the “Board of Control.” But if you are sharing common life according to that axiom of the Dominican regula, especially in its Lutheran recasting, you can’t have hierarchy, even benign hierarchy.

Even more complex than political democracy which may have some affinity to the Dominican axiom, we were doing it with a Lutheran foundation. We were learning to march simultaneously to two drums, even though both sets of sticks were in the hands of one and the same Drummer, one set in his left hand and the other in the right. That was new for all of us. It had to be learned, and thus at the outset it was sometimes messy and not patently “efficient.” Besides that there are always slow learners, and some folks don’t like what they learn.

Bob’s Internal Governance document articulating our common life according to the hermeneutics of law and gospel was one of a kind. It probably still is. Bob worked hard to teach it to us, for it was really our own theology applied institutionally to our own selves. With the students the learning came easier. Little wonder, we had been “explaining” its theological infrastructure to the students in their courses in systematic theology. But with our fellow faculty, our track record was not

so good. Eventually it got modified out of existence. Bob occasionally referred to it as "Seminex's best-kept secret." Some day someone ought to do a doctoral dissertation on this blessed failure.

The second item where Bob palpably—and organizationally—crossed over to "God's dear worldlings" with his Lutheran theology was in the Crossings Community. Its roots go all the way back to that theology curriculum he pioneered along with a bunch of us at Valparaiso University in the late 1950s. Here the point of the law-and-gospel's relevance was the secular callings these students (scarcely any of them seminary-bound) were envisioning and preparing for. The curriculum made their own secular worlds part of the study program.

During the days of Seminex Bob re-visioned the paradigm into a theology venture for grown-ups, folks already working out in the world. The goal was for them to learn to practice "the Crossings matrix." The process is a three-step. First to have the dear worldlings do some "tracking" of their own personal "text" out there in the world of daily work. Second came using the law-gospel lenses for getting some "grounding" in a Biblical text that showed up regularly in the Sunday liturgy. The final step was "crossing" those two "texts" with each other, so that the law-gospel of the Biblical text took flesh in the text of the worldling's own life. If curious, you'll find a fuller treatment—Bob's own—on the Crossings webpage.

Summa. Among international Lutheran scholars Bob was not a voice crying in the wilderness. You'll see that in the chapters that follow. He was in conversation with theologians around the world. For his brand of Lutheranism he had theological allies in the Luther Research Congress where he was a regular attender and presenter beginning already in the 1960s. He was a major presenter at the 1971 congress gathering that took place in St.

Louis. His drum-beat for sola fide (faith alone)—and not sola gratia (grace alone), Barth's preference— as THE center of the 16th century Reformation debate was shared by others. Sola fide orbits the same solus Christus (Christ alone) center as does theology of the cross and law-gospel hermeneutics.

In drawing confessing movements to orbit this center, Bob offers us his life's work. Though each of these chapters shows how others were doing it on their own witness stands, Bob pulls them together to this center—even to the point where he will show us that the mostly Roman Catholic confessing movement in the Philippines was running on the fuel of "sola fide"! That may sound like a stretch, but he says the evidence is there. See for yourself.

Bob's discovery of the "six clues" for times for confessing and his mastery in using them to help us see these seemingly disparate movements as united, yes, even centered, in the "one Gospel and sacraments" is a feisty proposal. Yet it is typical of his theological chutzpah all through the years. Even more, if valid, it's a milestone in ecumenical—and evangelical—theology.

"A voice from heaven says: 'Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labors, and their works do follow them'"(Rev. 14:13). Blessed Bob's now at rest, and from his work that follows him, we too are blessed.

*Edward H. Schroeder
St. Louis, Missouri
September 17, 2005*

The Augsburg Aha! – “Sacraments”

Colleagues,

Here’s the next installment of class handouts that Ron Neustadt and I are using with students in Springfield, Illinois for the course on Lutheran Confessional Theology. From the three previous postings of this material that were sent your way, at least one response has come back each time saying “send more.” So with that groundswell I’ll continue to do just that. [There are two more sessions still to come: Church and Secular Authority (AC 14-16, 23, 26-28) and then Human Will and Human Works (AC 6, 17-21).]

Peace and joy!
Ed Schroeder

Theology of the Augsburg Confession: Sacraments.

THE CONFESSORS’ ANGLE OF VISION

The “specs” for talking about church and sacraments—repeated over and over again—are simple: Is it according to, or contrary to, the Gospel? Note: the criterion is not “according to, or contrary to, the Bible.” Rather all church proclamation and practice are measured by the yardstick of the Good News itself. To be sure, the Bible, esp. the NT, is the primary source for understanding what the Gospel is, but the Gospel itself is the criterion for measuring things. That Gospel is the Good News

about [a] Christ's merits and benefits and [b] his promissory offer, [c] freely given to sinners, [d] inviting them to trust Him. [Note the four items.] This is the "dipstick" for measuring everything that claims to be Christian: doctrine, liturgy, ethics, church leadership, church programs, everything. Often in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology Melanchthon will condense these four items into just two "sides" of the dipstick: [1] Do Christ's merits and benefits get used or wasted? [2] Do sinners (troubled consciences) get the comfort Christ wants them to have so that they can live in freedom as "little Christs" in the world?

Example: In AC/Apol 13 on Ecclesiastical Rites.

When the late medieval church made certain rites into absolute requirements ("you gotta's"), the confessors say: these practices burden consciences, are contrary to the Gospel, and dishonor Christ who alone is necessary for salvation. "The chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel."

Moving now to the sacraments—

Remember the earlier definition of "ministry" from AC 5. Ministry is "pipeline-for-the-promise." This ministry is an add-on, we might say, after Christ's Easter that "God instituted . . . God provided . . . in order that we may obtain this faith [that justifies]." The ministry pipeline—Gospel proclaimed and sacraments enacted—mediates the "goodies" of Christ's promissory word/work to later generations living in other places. So in the background of everything the confessors say about sacraments is this notion of the PROMISE-PIPELINE. If some sacramental actions or traditions block the promise from coming through the pipeline, or reduce it to a trickle, they must be reformed. All the "changes" that the confessors have already made in their congregations by 1530, they say, have followed this axiom.

AC 9. **BAPTISM**

No conflict between confessors and confutators on this. Both agree that Anabaptist theology is contrary to the gospel. In Apology 9, we hear the “promise-pipeline” reason given for this: “It is most certain that the promise of salvation also pertains to little children . . . Therefore is it necessary to baptize little children in order that the promise of salvation might be applied to them according to Christ’s mandate.” In a side comment here Melanchthon gives the Lutheran reason why there is none of THIS sort of salvation outside the church. Salvation “does not pertain to those outside the Church of Christ, where there is neither Word nor sacrament, because Christ regenerates through Word and sacrament.” No Word-and-sacrament, = no promise-pipeline flowing, = no salvation.

There is a rather pragmatic proof that God approves of infant baptism. It goes like this: infant baptism has been the custom in the church for 1500 years. If God “disapproved” it, said “That’s a no-no,” then “the Holy Spirit would have been given to no one, no one would have been saved, and ultimately there would be no church.” But there IS church in our day—consisting of folks who were baptized in infancy—so it must be OK. God would not be mocked, if that’s what infant baptism were doing. Therefore the hard verdict: “The Anabaptists who condemn the baptism of little children teach wickedly.”

AC 10

THE LORD’S SUPPER

affirms the real presence: body and blood of Christ “truly present/really present” in the bread and wine.

Confut. says: What they say about real presence is fine, but concomitance must be asserted [=both Christ’s body and his blood are present in the wine, both also present in the bread]. Also transubstantiation, the orthodox teaching on HOW the elements become Christ’s body and blood, must be affirmed. [I.e.,

although the appearance of bread and wine remains the same, the “sub-stance”— what “stands-under” those appearances – changes. Transubstantiation = change of substance.]

Apology 10 acknowledges the agreement, but side-steps the two “ya gotta’s” about concomitance and transubstantiation. It speaks of Christ “truly and substantially present” in the LS, “truly offered [note the Gospel’s verb “offer” in contrast to the law’s key-verb “require”] . . . to those who receive the sacrament.” Frequent use of the term “participation.”

AC 11 & 12

CONFESSION AND THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

We keep Private Confession and Absolution in our congregations, but we don’t require the penitents “to enumerate all trespasses and sins [as the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) required], for this is impossible.” The rubrics mentioned above about “promise-pipeline” are applied throughout the Apology’s response to the Confut. It is bad theology/practice to “force, torture, ensnare, impose, require” when addressing guilty consciences. When the Confutators speak of Confession/Penance and never even mention Christ’s promise or faith in this promise as the way “to console consciences,” their fundamental defect is clear. There is no Good News there. “Console, encourage, liberate” a sinner’s accusing conscience, that is the Gospel’s language and intent in Confession and the sacrament of penance.

USE OF THE SACRAMENTS

AC 13: They are not merely signs about who is Christian, but even more “signs of God’s will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening faith.” Ergo, sacraments are “rightly used...when received in faith.” Therefore we reject the “ex opere operato” teaching (=if you are present when the action is happening, you receive the benefits). Not so; if you don’t trust the promise coming through the promise-pipeline of the

sacraments, the benefits pass you by.

Confutators say: Fine, but the number of them, 7, must be affirmed, and the confessors must show how their words in AC 13 apply to all of them, and then see to it that their people observe all 7 of them.

Apol. 13 “Numbers schnumbers!” Throughout the church’s history the numbers have varied. Important is to preserve what’s been handed down in Scripture. Our own definition (since there is no definition in the Bible, because the term is never used) of a sacrament is: “a rite (= a liturgical action) commanded by God, to which promise of grace has been added.” [Call it a “promise-pipeline authorized by God.”] By that definition there are three “genuine” sacraments. The remaining four (of the traditional 7 in the Roman church) don’t qualify, each for its own reason. God has put no “promise-pipeline” trademark on confirmation, marriage, ordination or last rites. Other items in the N.T. could almost qualify, if you took this or that particular slant on them: e.g., ordination—if the accent was on preaching the Gospel—could qualify, so also prayer and alms-giving.

Much more important than the number is “to know how to use the sacraments.” No surprise, it is by “trusting the promise.” Just do a word count in the last 3 paragraphs of Apology 13: promise appears 8 times, faith 15 times.

BOTH KINDS IN THE SACRAMENT

AC 22

We distribute both bread and wine to all who come to the Lord’s Supper. Those are the rubrics from Christ himself when he created this promise-pipeline: “Eat and drink of it , all of you.” To say, “Bread and wine only for the priests, but only bread for the laity” is simply “contrary to the institution of Christ.” The N.T. and major church fathers—popes

included—testify that “both kinds” has been the church’s practice. “No one knows when/how this custom of receiving only one kind was introduced.” But since it contradicts Christ, it has to be changed.

Confutation 22

responds with the bald assertion that “there has always been a distinction in the church between lay communion under one form and priestly communion under two forms.” That is documented with a reference to the sons of Eli in the OT and the conclusion “laity ought to be content to receive [only] one part.” Yes, “Christ did institute both forms of the sacrament,” but for good and proper reasons “the church, directed by the Holy Spirit [came] to forbid the laity from receiving both the bread and the wine.” Some of those reasons included “to combat heresy” and to avoid spillage of wine by “the old, young, tremulous, weak and mentally impaired” among the laity. In short, “because of many dangers the custom [bread and wine for the laity] has been discontinued.”

Apology 22

You can imagine Melanchthon’s response.

“Consider their impudence: Their chief reason is to exalt the status of the clergy . . . Our opponents are joking when they refer to Eli’s sons . . . Only a tyrant would say: ‘They ought to be content [with bread only]’ . . . They change Christ’s ordinance.” And then at the end: “Let them figure out how they will give an account of their decisions to God.”

THE MASS

AC 24. We are faithful, devoted, earnest Mass-observers. We’ve removed some of the accumulated abuses, which the bishops in the past did not do. Such abuses as: A) Claiming that Christ died to make satisfaction for our original sin only; with the mass we make sacrifices for all other sins. B) The mass works ex opere

operato [=performance of the action automatically bestows the benefits]. 3) Nearly total absence of using the mass to awaken faith, to comfort consciences with the promise. Instead we say: since the “operation” going on in the mass is a promise-pipeline “operation,” it is NOT a merit-bestowing work on our part, NOT a “sacrifice” from us to God, but God’s distribution to us of the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice. That is the only place to talk about “sacrifice” in the promise-pipeline of the mass.

Confutation 24

AC 24 is OK, as far as it goes, but . . . A) the mass ought to be done in Latin, since it is not necessary for the receiver to hear or understand the language. B) abuses need to be corrected, but money for mass is OK, C) Christ is indeed offered as a sacrifice to God in the Mass. Scads of ancient theologians, and the Bible too, testify that the mass is a sacrifice. D) Even the word Mass (from the Hebrew) means sacrifice. E) Abrogating private masses (where no congregation is present) is wrong. F) If one mass is a good thing, multiple masses are even better.

Apology 24

“Sacrifice” is an ambiguous term, so we left it alone in the AC 24 text. Here’s our take on sacrifice: Sacrament and sacrifice signal two different directions of action between God and people. Here’s the difference: “Sacrament is a ceremony or work in which God presents to us what the promise joined to the ceremony offers. By contrast, a sacrifice is a ceremony or work that we render to God.” “There are only two kinds of sacrifice. One is the atoning sacrifice, a work of satisfaction for guilt and punishment that reconciles God, conciliates the wrath of God or merits the forgiveness of sins.” [There has been only one like that in world history. You know who did it.]. “The other is the thanksgiving sacrifice . . . does not merit forgiveness or reconciliation, but is rendered by those already reconciled as a way for us to give thanks for having received forgiveness of

sins.” Fancy words for these two kinds of sacrifice are “propitiatory” and “eucharistic” (from Greek word eucharistia = giving thanks). One reconciles sinners to God (sinners can’t do that under any circumstances), the other is an action coming from already-reconciled sinners responding to God.

For the confutators to draw analogies from the O.T. sacrifice system and apply it to the mass is to ignore that “Levitical (=OT) worship” was abrogated on Good Friday [the tearing open of the temple curtain, that blocked off the Holy of Holies from the common folk, signalled that now the Mercy-seat of God is wide open to all]. The ex opere operato notion [“doing the operation” is all it takes] is wrong with reference to the mass too. The N.T. letter to the Hebrews gives “the primary support for our position.” Sacraments “work,” not according to the rubric “ex opere operato,” but “ex fide operato,” [=when faith is operating] and therefore masses for the dead are an “insult to the Gospel.” The dead have no functioning ears/hearts to hear, and then trust, the promise. A corpse can’t do that, nor can my promise-trusting be transferred to them. Nor can it be transferred to anyone alive. “Faith that recognizes mercy makes alive. This is the principal use of the sacrament, through which it becomes clear both that terrified consciences are the ones ‘worthy’ of it, and how they ought to use it.”

Conclusion: “The dignity of the mass and its proper use . . . is a great cause and a great issue, not inferior to the work of the prophet Elijah in condemning the worship of Baal.” When the people of the OT introduced Baal-worship, ex opere operato theology was at the base of it, a belief “that sacrifices merit the forgiveness of sins, rather than receiving it freely through faith. . . . But this notion clings to the world, and always will, that [human] services and sacrifices make atonement” [=give us a better “credit balance” with God].

CONCERNING CONFESSION

AC 25

is a repeat of AC 11 and 12. Repeated here because AC 11 and 12 presented “our teaching” on this sacrament, and now, AC 25, spells out “abuses corrected” as Confession and Absolution is practiced among us. The conclusion is: “confession is retained among us both because of the great benefit of absolution (which is confession’s principle and foremost part) and because of other advantages for consciences.”

Confutation 25

say “our views regarding confession have been given above in Article 11.” The importance of the three parts of this sacrament is reiterated: contrition in the heart, confession with the mouth, and a work of satisfaction. “This is perfect and fruitful repentance.”

There is no Apology 25, since Apology 11 and 12 have said all that needs to be said.

The Augsburg Aha! – Class Session #3. “Church and Ministry”

Colleagues,

I’ve just been alerted to a Luther bash coming up next weekend at Northwestern University (of all places!) in Evanston (north-Chicago suburb) Illinois. Big, big, big. Scads of Luther gurus according to the PR-nine of them from overseas.

The Global Luther: Reconsidering the Contributions of Martin Luther
An International Conference February 21-23, 2008

I've got this Confessions class to teach that weekend, so (sob!) I'm booked. Otherwise I'd want to be there. Some of you should go—and then give us a ThTh report to share with the readership. So far as I know, the conference is FREE! Here's where to find the details:

<www.religion.northwestern.edu/conferences/global Luther/program.html>

Meanwhile—back at the ranch—Ron Neustadt and I were in Springfield, Illinois, again last Saturday and what's pasted below is the first half (morning session) of what we did. Second half [Sacraments] comes your way next week.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Theology of the Augsburg Confession: Church and Ministry.

AC 5 The Office of the Ministry [=God's Pipeline System]

AC 7 The Church

AC 8 What the Church Is

AC 14 Order in the Church [Who should lead public worship]

AC 15 Ecclesiastical Order—Rules and Regulations in the Church

AC 5. In order to promote faith (what was just presented in AC 4: Justification by Faith) God has set up a delivery system, something like a pipeline. Nowadays we might call it “media.” God has created media [literally, “middle agencies”] to mediate the promise from the days when Jesus did it “live” on into the

future to folks—like us—who weren't in his audience in Palestine in those days. The “media” that transfer this promise are Gospel-proclamation and the sacraments-enacted. It's like a pipeline from the city waterworks to your kitchen sink. That's what the word “ministry” means. It's a delivery system. When the valves on the pipeline are opened, when the faucet's turned on, the promise flows to its intended receivers.

Sure, it's people who open the valves, who turn on the faucets, but “ministry” [the German word is “Amt” =the job to be done] is not the people taking care of the pipeline, but the pipeline itself. If there were no pipeline, the valve-and-faucet-turners would be spinning their fingers in the air. The pipeline is the ministry, God's marvelous invention for getting Christ's “goodies” into the hands of folks centuries away and oceans away from where Jesus once lived and walked. Ministers, pipeline operators, valve-turners, are in the picture, sure. But the “big deal” is the pipeline, not the valve-tenders.

The Holy Spirit uses these media to connect people to Christ's promise. The Anabaptists and others are wrong who say: Holy Spirit comes without any pipeline, without any “tangible” media.

[The fuller exposition of this goes as follows: Because the promise is so Christ-specific, who himself was so tangible, so “incarnate” [en-fleshed, see-able, touch-able, hear-able] as the New Testament presents him, he has tied promise-transmission to tangible media. The “Holy” Spirit is not the overall movement of the Spirit of God as witnessed throughout the scriptures. The “Holy” of Holy Spirit is fundamentally a NT term. In the NT the “Holy” Spirit is always Christ-specific, the promise-conveying Spirit—now after Easter—“proceeding from the Father and the Son.” There are no NT grounds, no word from Christ, for expecting the Christ-specific Spirit to mediate the promise “im-media-tely,”—with no media, not via tangible “instruments,” as

AC 5 says. And given what this promise actually is, how might one even envision receiving it without someone tangibly offering it? It's because of the specific character of the Gospel-promise at the hub of the wheel in Augsburg theology that the spoke labelled "Holy Spirit" says: "works through media to transfer the promise."]

Confutation 5 says: AC 5 is OK. But when AC5 speaks of "faith," that would be OK if they did not say: "faith ALONE justifies." That's wrong. It takes "faith, hope, and charity (love)"-all 3-before you have a de facto justified sinner.

[There is no Apol 5. Melanchthon spent most all of Apology 4-pages and pages-responding to what the Confutators said against "faith alone."]

AC 7 The church will last forever-that is Christ's promise. The church is a gathering of people where something special is happening: Gospel preaching and the sacraments. What is needed, and what is not needed, for church unity? ONLY this: Gospel proclaimed "purely" [= without any legalist contamination] and sacraments administered in a way congruent with that Gospel-promise.

Confut. 7: AC 7 is not OK. It speaks only of believers in the church. What about "wicked people and sinners" in the church. AC 7 says nothing about that.

[There is no Apology 7. It is combined with Apol 8 below.]

AC 8. The church is "strictly speaking" only the believers, but there are unbelievers in the congregations and church organization, even among the pastors. Nevertheless, even when

the ungodly do as Christ commanded—proclaim the Good News and administer the sacraments “gospelly”—these actions are “good” and they work to bring people to faith and to keep them Christ-connected. The pipeline functions even when the valve-openers are not Gospel-trusters. The only issue is: did they, or did they not, open the Gospel-valve? The Donatists in the early church were wrong about this, saying that wicked/unbelieving priests didn’t do, couldn’t do, “pure” Gospel preaching and “good” sacraments.

Confutation 8: This article is OK.

Apol 7 & 8 There really is a disagreement between us and the Confutators on the topic of church. Our definition centers on “Sinners connected to Christ. People who trust Christ. And the pipeline that supplies the connection so that sinners may ‘obtains such faith,’ as AC 5 puts it.” They are talking about the churchly institution with all its rules, regulations, and especially the structure of the papacy, and all that goes with that. Connection to the Bishop of Rome, not connection with Christ, is their main criterion. There are no Biblical grounds for such a claim. It is not true that our idea of “church” is “platonic,” imaginary, just an idea, with no concrete structure. No, ours is very concrete: it’s people, where the concrete “marks” are happening, Gospel and Sacraments. That is tangibly real, not imaginary. At a number of places in Apology 7/8 we hear Melanchthon’s sarcastic definition of what the “opponents” think the church is. He is not a happy camper about this.

Of course, there are unbelieving sinners mixed in to the empirical church. So we make the distinction between “strictly speaking,” and “broadly speaking” when talking about this. [Melanchthon doesn’t speak of visible/invisible church. He favors the language of revealed/hidden church. Things “hidden” are not invisible. Something is covering them, but they are

really there. The church is regularly (always?) "hidden" when viewed with the world's lenses, "hidden beneath the cross," just as Christ's own Messiahship was. Nothing razzle-dazzle about it in contrast to the pomp and show of the papal church. ["Sub cruce tecta" was one of Luther's favored phrases: hidden beneath the cross.]

The "true unity of the church" does not come from being connected with the church organization, the Church of Rome. Unity happens when people are on the receiving end of the pipeline, for that joins them to Christ. When they are joined to Christ, they are joined to each other. That's the simplest definition of church: sinners connected to Christ by trusting him—which makes them forgiven sinners—and therefore forgiven sinners connected with each other.

AC 14 For public preaching and sacrament administration, people should be called (by some concrete church-agency outside of themselves) and not take the job just because they hear an "inside" call.

Confut. 14 That's OK. But make sure that the process follows the rules of the church, the rules of "our" church.

Apol. 14. We do follow the rules. Still we say: these rules come from human authority, not God's authority. So they can be changed.

AC 15 As far as Church customs and practices, we follow much of what has been passed down [=tradition] to us in the (Roman) church. Two points we make: these are human, not divine, things. In our pastoral work we make a point not to "burden consciences" and to emphasize that such traditions are "not necessary for

salvation.” Things that do burden consciences and are said to be necessary for salvation “are useless and contrary to the Gospel.” So we modify them “according to the Gospel.”

Confut. 15 It’s good that the Confessors follow the church’s customs and practices. But the “appendix” they add [not burdening consciences and not necessary for salvation] is wrong. No, you MUST keep some rites and customs and they do contribute to salvation.

Apol 15 is also predictable. It is a re-run of Apology 4. If any “must”—something you’ve “gotta” do or be—gets added to “trusting Christ,” it’s a no-no.

Class discussion.

1. If “ministry” (AC 5 and 14) in the Lutheran dictionary really means “the promise-pipeline,” what help would that offer for the ongoing debates about ordained ministry, ministry of the laity, and, above all, the program all 12 of you students are following to become un-ordained “Synodically Authorized Ministers” here in the Central/Southern Synod of the ELCA?
2. If “Church” really is what AC7/8 say it is, what “reforms” are needed in your congregation? In your denomination? What might be a first step in one particular case where such reform is needed?
3. What are the “you’ve gotta” items vexing Christians today—liturgical, musical, ethical, experiential, cultural, linguistic, or whatever else? E.g., What about the “worship wars” nowadays? How might “according to the Gospel” be used today for “reformation” in these conflict areas?

Next session: Sacraments according to the Augsburg Confession.

Some More Thoughts on the Augsburg Aha! – The Augsburg Confession Itself–Class Session #2.

Colleagues,

Here is the second installment of “Lutheran Confessional Heritage,” the Ron-and-Ed Show–Ron Neustadt and yours truly–running from January through March, 2008 in Springfield, Illinois, a class for students of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod of the ELCA.

Peace and joy!
Ed Schroeder

Theology of the Lutheran Confessions–Class Session #2.

Lesson Plan

1. Opening Devotions
2. Review of Session One: “What was the fight all about on Original Sin?”
3. The Son of God – Article III of Aug. Conf, the Confutation and the Apology Walk-talk our way through the textsLUNCH BREAK
4. Justification – Article IV of the AC, Confutation and

Apology What was that fight all about?

5. R.Bertram's essay: "The Hermeneutical Significance of Apology IV"
 6. Is justification still worth fighting about today?
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Here's how we filled in the blanks.

2. Review of Session One: "What was the fight all about on Original Sin?" One-sentence answer:

The fight was about how serious original sin is, with one side (AC folks) saying it's terminal, and the other side (RC folks) saying it's serious, but fixable using the resources at hand.

Paragraph-length answer supporting this thesis sentence:

- A. One side says: Sin is so serious that it's like getting your car "totalled." The whole thing is wrecked. It'll have to be replaced with an entirely new vehicle. Other side says: No, no, it's seriously damaged, sure. But it can be repaired. And here's the repair shop where God's grace heals the damage.
- B. Both sides—like two M.D.s—agree that the diagnostic term for the sin-problem is the big word (doctors are all alike!) "concupiscence." [Latin: "cupere" = to desire. Prefix "con" intensifies the verb.] But the M.D.s disagree on what concup. is. Again that means they disagree on HOW SERIOUS the affliction is. Augsburg Confessors say: Concupiscence (Latin) is the N.T. term for human self-centeredness, "doing my own thing" and thumbing my nose at God in the process—call it "no fear of God, no trust in God." This is the "shape, slant, tilt" of sinner-existence (Melanchthon's Latin word is "inclination"). The

fabric of a sinner's life—thoughts, words, and deeds—has this shape. Sins (plural) are concup. “in action.”

- C. Confutators define concupiscence (using Aristotle's definition) as the psycho-bio-drives of human nature. Nothing wrong with them at all, they say, until they get out of control. That's what the seven deadly sins are—normal “OK” needs/urges running amok, out of control. That signals what original sin is: control-mechanism malfunction. “Upper level” management (labelled “original righteousness”) is gone. That's the sin of “origin.” Consequently the next level down, the control mechanisms (human reason and will) are damaged—not all the time, but often. So human behavior, arising from the “ground-level,” – the “cupere” of psycho-biological stuff in people—gets out of hand. That's what “actual” (not original) sin is—concupiscence badly managed and thus destructive. It's serious, but not fatal.
- D. How does Christ figure in as remedy for the sin-problem? Just how necessary is Christ, and for what? That is where the “fight” about sin moves to the hub of the wheel: how do sinners get “un-sinned,” aka “justified”? Where does Christ fit in? For what is Christ necessary? In the Apology Melanchthon challenges his Confutator respondents to show just how necessary Christ is in their theology for sinners to get their sin-problem fixed. He's an insider himself in the scholastic heritage—that was his education too—so he knows. The answer is: “not much.”

Confutation and Apology

- A. Check the key terms in both the German and Latin versions of the AC. Note: Christ's person –“true God, true man”– and work. Note the “good-news” verbs for the Work of Christ: “sacrifice, conciliate [earlier translators said “propitiate”], reconcile (note the direction of the reconciling action, “to reconcile the Father to us!”), sanctify,” and more. Note the “so that” in the AC text, which doesn't merely confess “orthodox Christology,” but links it to the “work” of Christ. All of this hype about the “person” of Christ “so that” Christ might “fix” our God-problem [That's what AC I & AC II have just said: “God is real, God is three-in-one, and we are in trouble with that God, big trouble.”]
- B. The Confutation response is: AC III is OK. Note: Confutation responds only to the “person of Christ” part of AC II, not to the “work of Christ.” It is at that point, the “work” of Christ, that the fight breaks out in the next article. Apology III in response to the Confut. merely says: They approve what we said in AC III.

4. Justification – Article IV of the AC, Confutation and Apology **What's the fight all about on Justification?**

One-sentence answer:

“Justification” is getting a sinner “un-sinned,” with one side saying “God's grace joined to human good works, good intentions (however minimal), can do it” and the other side saying “No way—it takes a massive forgiveness-intervention on God's part, a.k.a the crucified and risen Jesus, a.k.a. God keeping his promise, to un-sin (=justify) a sinner.”

Paragraph-length answer supporting this thesis sentence:

- A. Since the diagnosis is so different, it's no surprise that the "healing" for sinners is also very different. If the human "car" is just damaged—even badly damaged by Adam's careless "accident"—then the resources needed to fix it are less than what's needed if it's totalled. The Confessors say: It IS totalled, but Christ is God's new BIG deal to rescue sinners even when they are totalled.
- B. The Confutation's "healing" proposal is to make use of the good stuff still in the damaged vehicle [=get the sinners to "do what's in them," namely, small-scale efforts of good will, still possible for sinners]. These good efforts merit God's "grace-reward" and that grace starts replacing what's gotten all twisted and tangled in Adam's accident. Once grace is triggered by such merit, it starts refilling that "management vacuum" at the top that Adam/Eve brought upon themselves—and upon all the rest of us too. Like all repair jobs, this process takes a while (not instantaneous), regularly a life-long while. But at the end full "righteousness" (everything OK again) is achieved. Without God's grace it couldn't happen. It is a cooperative project: human effort, aided and abetted by God's grace.
- C. Another way of saying it: Within sinners there exist limited resources for healing. Sinners are not totally helpless. "Doing what [good] is in them," they trigger the process. God responds, rewarding that goodness with grace. Grace corrects the "management disorder" at the center of sin. Sure, Christ is in the mix as God's #1 fixer-upper and

grace-giver, but he's a REPAIR-MAN, not one who creates a brand new human being. And to be fixer-upper, he wouldn't really have to do that crazy stuff at the end—cross and resurrection. It is extraordinary grace that he did so to show us how far God is willing to go with the grace-business. But Christ's cross and resurrection are not "necessary" for sinners to get restored. Even without Good Friday and Easter sinners are fixable. God is gracious toward sinners (by definition) even without Christ.

- D. The Confutators do talk about "faith" (as they define it): believing the truths of the Christian creeds—centered, of course, in Christ. Such believing is itself MERITorious and brings additional grace-rewards. That accelerates the process toward becoming a completely (100%) justified (former) sinner. Rare is any "I am 100% justified before God NOW" sort of certainty. How can there be? Justification is a process: "I am on the way to becoming 100% justified. Here's where the third theological virtue called "hope" comes in alongside the other two, "faith" (as defined above) and "love" (innate "goodness" being grace-perfected). My hope centers on God bringing the process to 100% completion.
- E. The Confessors shudder at this whole thing. Since their view of sin is so drastic, there are no resources left in sinners for beginning the "fix-me-up" process. Even adding God's grace to the mix doesn't help, since the whole system is merit-based—like Brownie points and Boy Scout "merit" badges. That necessarily puts the whole thing into a process they call "law"—performance and reward. And

they claim that this is what “law” is in the scriptures too—a pattern of performance and reward. Good reward from God for good performance and “ouch” reward for bad performance. It’s the crazy “law-opinion” in sinners that if they tried harder to be good, they could fix the sin-problem. Au contraire, says the Apology: In a fallen world God’s law “always accuses us” of being sinners. When sinners try to use this very law of God to get “un-sinned,” when they choose a merit-system to relate to God, they are crazy. It’s suicide. Sinners become cinders.

- F. The remedy that does work is called “forgiveness.” Forgiveness is the opposite of what law calls for with sinners. Forgiveness has Christ at the center, the Grand Sin-Forgiver by virtue of HIS “merits” on Good Friday and Easter. Christ offers this to sinners as a promise. The promise is an absolute freebee. Promises work when they are trusted. They “only” work when trusted. Therefore “faith-alone,” “trusting this promise alone” is what un-sins sinners. An un-sinned sinner is a justified sinner. So justification by faith ALONE is really a no-brainer. That is the “only” way, the “alone” way, that promises ever work. Everybody knows that.
- G. Faith is just such trusting Christ’s promise. A Christ-trusting sinner = a non-sinner. Christ says so. That’s his promise. It is this faith “alone” that un-sins sinners – 100% right now when faith happens, when Christ-trusting begins. What about the long haul, the “process”? “Christ remains mediator,” almost a mantra, recurs throughout Apology IV. Christ the mediator remains the continuing antidote to trump the continuing nemesis of “law always

accusing" us. Accusing us of what? Of not being faith-full enough, hope-full enough, love-full enough. In the face of the law's ongoing "gotcha!" Christ "remains" with his own law-trumping "gotcha," his mercy-promise sent our way over and over again in words and "tangibilized" over and over again sacramentally. Such Christ-trusting sinners are already home free NOW—and trust that as Christ-trusters they are free all the way "home."

An alternate single sentence for what the fight's all about on justification could be this:

The fight is about this: "How to commend good works without losing Christ's promise."

Supporting material—

- A. Confutators argue: If there is no merit for doing good works, who will do any good works at all? Or—same difference—If you say sinners are "justified by FAITH ALONE," who will even bother to do any deeds of charity? So we've GOTTA keep merit and reward in the equation or there'll never be any good works. We're concerned about ethics.
- B. Confessors respond. We're concerned about ethics too. But the Promise gets lost in your equation. So that can't be right. We say: Keep good works (acts of charity) OUT of the equation when talking about our God-relation [technical Latin term is: coram deo]. Put Christ and his promise IN there to heal the sinner's God-problem. Then promote good-works, yes, on the horizontal turf of me-and-my-neighbor, my life in the world [Latin: coram hominibus], not the verticle turf of God-and-me. Good works are the

fruit of justification, not the cause.

- C. Christ sets promise-trusters free to get busy loving the neighbor. Really “free” since they don’t need to hustle brownie points for themselves while loving the neighbor, stuff to take back and show to God. But will they do it—the Confutators challenged—without rewards? Of course, say the confessors. Only sinners are reward-hungry. Forgiven sinners not so. They are living on God’s mercy. [“Mercy” gets used in Apology IV to replace “grace,” if for no other reason than that “grace” is so abstract a term, while “mercy” is more nitty-gritty and clearly inter-personal.] Merci-fied sinners are in a different ball game. Forgiveness is the flat-out opposite of merit-reward. Trusting Christ, they take their signals from him. What he tells them is simple: “Once you trust me, then follow me.” That’s the REAL way to get works done, works that God himself calls “good,” yes “very good.” [When folks claim to be Christ-trusters and yet “do nothing for the neighbor,” they are self-deceivers. That is the issue in the Epistles of John. It is not their ethics that is kaput; it’s their Christ-connection. Remedy for them: back to square one to start all over and get their Christ-connection restored.]

5. R.Bertram’s essay: “The Hermeneutical Significance of Apology IV”

- A. In making their case against “faith alone” the Confutators pile up Bible passages for support to show that what the AC says about justification is contrary to scripture. So how will the Apology respond if the Confutators have all the Bible passages on their side? Right! It will have to start

out by spelling out a “right” way and a “wrong” way to use the Bible. And that is what author/scribe Melanchthon does in the opening paragraphs of Apology IV. He calls it a “preface” on “right and wrong” ways to read the Bible. [Fancy word for this nowadays is “hermeneutics.” In nickel words: What lenses are you using when you read the Bible?] Melanchthon proposes a “law and promise” hermeneutics. He hears the Confutators using “law only” lenses. Worst aspect of that is that they seem not to know the promise at all, have never bumped into it. And so—no surprise—since they don’t know it, they don’t use it at all as their eyepiece for reading the Bible. When the promise is lost, there is only one lens left for Biblical hermeneutics.

B. In the last half of the text of Apology IV Melanchthon examines the many Biblical texts which the Confutators piled up against “promise-and-faith-alone.” He looks first at the “law-alone” reading coming from the confutators on each text and then runs these texts through a law/promise set of lenses. It’s a brilliant tour-de-force culminating in the “gotcha” text the Confutators claim to have from James about faith AND works combined. Melanchthon takes that text (James 2:24 – “no other passage is supposed to contradict our position more”), runs it through his law/promise hermeneutic, and has the chutzpah to conclude: “This text is more against our opponents than against us.” Is he fudging? Sleight of hand? See for yourself. Apology IV, paragraph 244ff.

C. Here’s where Bob Bertram’s essay fits in: “The Hermeneutical Significance of Apology IV.” For the full text GO to

<<https://crossings.org/archive/bob/hermeneutics-1974.htm>> In class with the students we walked/talked our way through Bob's essay like this, paragraph by paragraph:

1. "How to commend good works without losing the promise" is Melanchthon's agenda in Apology 4. He shows that "Biblical hermeneutics is at no point separable from Biblical soteriology." How you read the Bible is always linked to how you think people get saved.
2. Three elements are in the mix: the text, the interpreter and the interpreter's critic.
3. This third partner is important in formulating the question which the interpreter may have to re-formulate (re-interpret) to keep it from being sub-gospel.
4. Melanchthon took his critics seriously for another reason: They had some Biblical base for their criticism, Biblical LAW, although it was Biblical-Law-plus something, viz., non-Biblical OPINIO LEGIS, the opinion that "If I do the right thing, then I AM a righteous person." Question: is the Bible schizophrenic (good Bible vs. bad Bible)?
5. Melanchthon finally says no, but only after he has done the job of distinguishing law from promise within the scriptures.
6. He distinguishes so that they may later be joined properly, not improperly (wrongly, contra-biblically) into a legalistic mishmash that is neither promise nor law.
7. The key to how to distinguish and re-join into coexistence the law and the promise is to have the sinner take Christ's victory over the law

SOLA FIDE, entirely on faith. Faith, this Christ-trusting faith, keeps the two properly connected, not faith's works. That's the soteriological secret, and the hermeneutical one.

8. SOLA FIDE is the only right way to "use" Christ and his history. Trusting a promise is the only way to benefit from a promise, the only way to properly honor the promissor.
9. Obscuring the SOLA FIDE lets the Bible go to waste; that also lets Christ go to waste.
10. Melanchthon does not simply say: the history happened and you better believe it! No, he seeks to show how we NEED the Jesus-history, how we need God's-promise-kept (= necessitating Christ) so that good works could freely be commanded and "commended without losing the promise."
11. If here or there in the Bible the promise is not obvious, Melanchthon "adds" it, as he says. But this adding, he claims, is the opposite of the Confutators' "adding" OPINIO LEGIS to Biblical law, for Melanchthon's adding is itself commended Biblically (in such passages as John 15:5 and Hebrews 11:6), namely that God was and is still justifying the ungodly by faith alone.

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6. Is justification still worth fighting about today?ThTh readers can guess what the answer was. In the language of Lake Wobegon: "Yah sure, you betcha." It has always been at the center. Already in the New Testament we read about "other" gospels. Such "other" gospels have continued throughout 2000 years of church history. Every brand of

gospel makes an offer for how people who aren't (yet) OK can get to be OK. In nickel words that is the "justification agenda." About which there is constant conflict—also inside church denominations, inside congregations. Today is no different.

The religious marketplace of America today offers a wide variety of gospels—coming not just from different "world religions" (Islam, Buddhism, etc), but also coming with the label "Christian." Each claims to be THE Good News At the center of each is always a "special brand" for the justification agenda—how to get to be OK.

Those brands of Gospel that claim to be Christian always follow the Bertram axiom: How you read the Bible is always linked to how you think people get saved. Or in reverse: How you think people get saved (and saved from what?) is always linked to how you read the Bible.

The salvation agenda is the justification agenda. The jailer at Philippi (Acts 16) asks the question that never disappears from human history after Eden: "What must I do to be saved?" "Other" gospels have "other" answers, different from the one Silas and Paul gave the jailer, "Trust the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." The "fight" about justification is the "fight" about that 10-word sentence. Is that THE gospel, or should we look for another?

Pardon My Imprisonment – Anticipating Ash Wednesday.

Colleagues,

Though tempted to focus ThTh 503 on the theology of President Bush's "State of the Union" address earlier this week, I resisted that concupiscent (?) yen. Or so I thought. But then I thought about what all might not be said. And pretty soon . . . Well, here it is.

[Next time (maybe) "Some More Thoughts on the Augsburg Aha! – The Augsburg Confession Itself–Class Session #2." The Ron-and-Ed show in Springfield, Illinois]

The president's speech revealed the "state" of our president. And the state of the president of the USA "is" the state of the union called the USA. He does indeed incarnate our nation. His faith is our national faith. The deities are progress, capitalism, consumerism (e.g., "stimulus" package needed so we can spend more—even if our children/grandchildren will someday have to be sacrificed to the Molech of paying for our bacchanal billions-for-binges), the American way—all under the mantra of "freedom and liberty" (with coercive force, if necessary).

Our president's gospel is indeed the Gospel of our nation. No wonder Teddy Roosevelt labelled the US president's office a "bully pulpit." We may hype our separation of church and state. But if the president is not preaching to us the gospel we do believe, he'd better get better speech-writers. The state of the union address is a sermon to the already "converted," the true believers. "This is indeed what we all believe, right? These are indeed our gods, right? Well, then, let the people say 'Amen!'" And we do. Even though we may "gritch" about the proclaimer, the

proclamation does articulate our national faith.

Repent? Turn around? You've got to be kidding. Nor do any of the candidates striving to be our next president ever come close in the tsunami of words rolling over us these days. Yes, they all are calling for "change." Of course. But it's rearranging deck-chairs on the Titanic. Repent? 180-degree turn-around from these dear deities? No candidate talks like that. None dare to talk like that. You can't get elected by calling the people to desert their gods. Unthinkable.

Better expressed biblically, it's "impossible." 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. That's what the Bible is talking about with its language about humanity "in bondage" to sin. Not in bondage to misbehaviors, though that may well be true. But "worse than that," in bondage to "principalities and powers"—as the NT designates them. Forces—real but most often invisible—in the managerial sphere of our lives, over whom we have no control. THEY own us. It's not "we own them" —so that we might conceivably someday dis-own them. And most of the time we willingly consent to that ownership. Regularly deem it benevolent. Serve it with (most) all our heart, (most) all our soul, (most) all our mind, (most) all the time.

So it is seldom that we even think about breaking their hold on us, let alone seeking to be free from them. These "values," these "rights," are just that—"right!" Godly, for sure, "endowed by the Creator." Especially for Americans "freedom" itself is at the top of the list. Who could want to be free from freedom? Insane. But when freedom, our primal American shibboleth, slides over from being a gift to being itself the Giver, when it "owns" us, a demonic switcheroo takes place. We slide into bondage and cannot free ourselves. The deities of FROGBA—the Folk Religion of God Bless America—seem to be so winsome most of the time. And

they are. But when they become de facto deities—when we “can’t imagine living without them”— then they have crossed the line. And so have their worshippers.

St. Paul’s strange-sounding mantra for cherishing the good stuff of life, but keeping it out of the God-box, was “having as though we had not.” (I Cor. 7:29-31). Bob Bertram’s version of that was to praise such gifts, but “limit their soteriological pretensions.” Which being interpreted in Shroederese: “keep them out of the God-box, from assuming the role of savior.”

In order for us to be “free” of principalities and powers, they have to be conquered. Some outside lord—outside of us—has to intervene and “lord” it over them, if it is to happen at all. Self-manumission from slavery never happens.

Many deities come in under the term “God” in the Folk Religion of God Bless America. Some were mentioned in that list of “-isms” above. If we had ears to hear, we would get the message from THEIR bully pulpits. It is just one word, “Gotcha!” Once we hear that word—and “fess up” to it—the proper response is to invoke an other deity, an other Lord, the “true” God with the words: “Kyrie eleison! Lord have mercy.”

We are with this ThTh posting just a few days away from this year’s super-early Ash Wednesday with its full season of “turn-around” texts, beginning with the Ash Wednesday Gospel’s roster of “turn-arounds” for “practicing your piety.” (Matt. 6) All of them but variations on the “standard” one recited regularly on Sundays in our congregation. Right from the git-go this formula admits that the “Gotcha!” is true. “We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. . . .” Not just in bondage to bad habits of not loving God or neighbor—as bad as that indeed is—but in bondage to powers, “-isms,” that do indeed run our lives, displacing both God and neighbor in the process.

Six times that Matt. 6 text refers to the Father operating “in secret.” Sometime it’s the “Father who IS in secret,” sometimes the “Father who SEES in secret.” “Kryptos” is the Greek term for secret and cryptic that text is at first glance. But maybe not totally. If the topic is repentance—and it is—then the cryptic [=hidden, not pin-point-able] places are the control-centers of our lives. They can’t be seen, you can’t actually “put your finger on them.” But their engines are running and they are running the show. The “crypt” is the stage where the show is running. Jesus’ call to repentance in Matt. 6 is a probe into the crypt. And it’s not just Jesus. He tells us that his line of vision is God’s line of vision, God “seeing” into the crypt and spotlighting the other deities that have usurped God’s primordial turf there. And their engines are running.

They are principalities and powers, the invaders into the control centers, the aliens in the crypt. When the Ephesian epistle locates these p-and-p’s in the “heavenly places,” I don’t think it’s directing us to look up into the sky. Rather the heavenly places are the places where “heaven-and-heaven’s true God” are to be in charge. Not up there, but down here “in the crypt,” inside our skin, at the human control-center that the Bible calls “the heart.” It is with this metaphor that the Ash Wednesday Gospel concludes: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Gearing up for Lent is getting our own engines running, especially the auditory ones. ‘Tis the season to tune up in order to tune in to God’s “crypto-gram,” the message from God’s center to our own. First diagnostic of that crypt, then with offering a new prognosis.

The collect for Ash Wednesday and the Psalm for that day couldn’t be more sharply focused. “Create in us new and honest [=no self-deception] hearts,” we pray in the Collect. And the

Psalm asks for “truth in my inward being . . . wisdom in my secret(!) heart,” concluding with “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and confident spirit within me.”

It’s a pleasant English language gift that the words “Lent” and “repent” rhyme. Who’s in charge at the control-center? That is Lent/repent’s first question. After identifying the aliens, the next step is baptism-revisited. In Luther’s prose: “What’s the life-long sign that comes with baptism?” Answer: (with metaphors recast) “That the aliens at the control-centers within us be drowned and die with all their machinations and, again, a new human come forth and arise, who shall live under God’s righteousness-management, ‘clean’ from here to eternity.”

Brother Martin, we may ask, are you making this up? No, he says in his Small Catechism, I copied it. Here’s the original “We are 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.” (Rom. 6)

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?

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Some Thoughts on the Augsburg Aha! – The Augsburg Confession Itself

Colleagues:

A funny thing happened on the way to ThTh 500. While I was not confecting anything for that half-thousandth posting because 16 of you were sending in the puzzle pieces for number 500, I got a phone call. “Can you—at this eleventh hour—teach a course on Lutheran Confessions at Springfield, Illinois (100 miles up north from St. Louis on the Interstate) starting already Saturday January 12? It’s an every-other-Saturday all-day-long seminar for ELCA folks from Illinois enrolled in an alternate-

track for pastoral credentials.” At the other end of the phone was Ron Neustadt (Seminex 1974), himself pastor at St. Mark Lutheran Church (ELCA) across the Mississippi in Belleville, Illinois and authorized agent of the outfit offering the course. That “outfit” is LST-STL, the “Lutheran School of Theology – St. Louis,” a grass-roots boot-straps seminary-for-everybody, an agency of the Metro St. Louis Coalition of ELCA congregations on both sides of the river. “Only under one condition will I say yes,” I told Ron, “and that is if you and I do it together.” He said OK, and we’re in business.

I’m the goldie-oldie who’s done it umpteen times before, Ron (enrolled in one of those done-it-before confessions classes at Seminex three decades ago) has that many years of experience as a pastoral theologian. During those years he’s been consciously and creatively doing his pastoral praxis in the Augsburg tradition. So teaming up with Ron for my “old job” is a new thing—and after our first venture a fortnight ago—also great fun. He’s got pastoral stories for nigh onto every Augsburg item.

Ron also has more energy than I, so he put together the syllabus and assignments.

One textbook resource we have is itself a product of LST-STL, from the time when Michael Hoy was dean of the school. To teach the “Augsburg” part of the Lutheran Confessions (aka Book of Concord) Mike created a synopsis—parallel texts—of the three major documents from the “battle” that went on at Augsburg in 1530.

First column on the left side of the page is the text of the Augsburg Confession itself—article by article, all 28 of them. Alongside that (second column) is the Roman Catholic official response (“Confutation”) to each AC article all the way through.

Third column is the Confessors' response to the Confutation, Philip Melanchthon's "Apology (=Latin word for defense) of the AC." This too article by article 1 to 28.

So students read texts left-to-right across the page.

Column 1: Here's what the AC says: Art. 1 about God, Art 2 about original sin, etc.

Column 2: Here's what the Confutators said about that article.

Column 3: Here's what Melanchthon says about what "they" said about that article.

It's Mike's brilliant teaching device for getting to the nitty-gritty in a hurry. And we have "only" five Saturdays to walk/talk students through those 28 articles.

For our first Saturday Ron and I met at an Interstate intersection in Illinois (before sunrise!) for the two-hour drive to Springfield.

We met the twelve students at an ELCA church there. After getting acquainted we attempted this:

First off some historical stuff—what is a confession? What does that term (homologia) mean in the New Testament? Then in subsequent church history? What had happened in "Reformation" history leading up to Augsburg? What was at stake for the Aug. Confessors? All of the AC signers were laity. Also Philip Melanchthon, the theologian-author of the text! Luther, under the imperial ban, not present.

How is the AC put together? Its flow-chart. Twenty-one articles of doctrine where we "surely" are "orthodox" as any Catholic can see. Articles 22-28 are about church-life changes we've made BECAUSE of our Catholic faith. Note the Gospel-centered "system" for uniting the 28 articles. Passed on Bob Bertram's bon mot

that the 28 “articles” of the AC are intentionally(?) 28 varieties for “articulating” the one and only “doctrine” in the AC, namely, THE “doctrine of the Gospel” – “doctrina evangelii” in the Latin text of AC 5.

That took up the three hours in the morning. Ron and I had agreed on a ping-pong pattern for who’s at the podium moving through these topics—with comments welcome from the silent partner on the sidelines at any time. It went well.

Half hour lunch and back to work. Three more hours.

AC article 1: God.

“Our churches teach with great unanimity that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the unity of the divine essence and concerning the three persons is true and should be believed without any doubting.” Then follows the language of Nicaea to define “essence” and “person.” AC 1 concludes with a condemnation of the heresies “contrary to this article” that were rejected at Nicaea (325 A.D.). We noted that the “heresy of the Manichaeans, who assert that there are two supernatural powers, one good and one evil” in unending conflict in world history, is often proclaimed these days from the “bully pulpit” of the US White House.

Important to know is that in the Holy Roman Empire at this time, if you were not “orthodox” according to the Nicene Creed, you were also a political enemy of the Empire, a traitor. Therefore demonstrating that you were Nicene-orthodox also demonstrated that you were no traitor. Another notable item is the notion of “believe” in AC 1. There is not (yet) any hint here that the Confessors’ “new look” about faith/believing is “trusting Christ’s promise.” Here the object of “believing” is the text of the Nicene creed. The claim is it “should be believed.” The Augsburg Aha! about faith as promise-trusting doesn’t surface

until later in the AC.

Confutation says AC 1 is OK.

Apology 1 acknowledges this approval and then just to make it “perfectly clear” Melanchthon says “We have ALWAYS taught and defended this [Trinitarian] doctrine. . . We STEADFASTLY maintain [it].” We are indeed Nicene-orthodox, neither heretics nor traitors.

AC 2 “Original Sin.”

Here is the full text: “Likewise, they [=the undersigned] teach that since the fall of Adam all human beings who are propagated according to nature are born in sin, that is, without fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence. And they teach that this disease or original fault is truly sin, which even now damns and brings eternal death to those who are not born again through baptism and the Holy Spirit. They condemn the Pelagians and others who deny that the original fault is sin and who, in order to diminish the glory of Christ’s merits and benefits, argue that human beings can be justified before God by their own powers of reason.”

Some things to note:

1. The text says: “SINCE the fall of Adam,” not “because” of the fall of Adam. The Reformers do not “blame” Adam for sin coming into the world. God holds each sinner accountable for his/her own sinfulness in the Bible. Never does a sinner in the Bible get away with saying: “Adam and Eve are the ones who are at fault for me being a sinner. Not me.” Instead the Confessors say: Ever since Adam (and Eve too) stopped trusting God’s word spoken to them, people have been doing the same throughout human history. Adam/Eve were the first ones recorded in the Bible to do this. But since their time, all people have been doing the

same thing.

2. "Born IN sin" is what the text says. Sin is like "soup." We are IN it.
3. TWO ITEMS are NOT present in a sinner: NO fear of God (=not saying Yes when God's law passes his verdict on us) and NO trust in God (not saying Yes to God's gospel) – and ONE ITEM has replaced the two missing items: concupiscence (the YEN, the URGE, the DESIRE to do things MY WAY, so that the arrow of my life always curves back into myself).
4. Note: "Original" sin–primal sin, sin-at-the-root–is not sin that I DO, but sin that I am "in." "Sinner" is a person curved away from God and curved into self. That is the "soup" that sinners are IN. That curvature already marks my PERSON even before I do any act at all–any thought, word, or deed. It is my sinner-person (me curved-back-into-myself) that then does start doing things that can be called sinS (plural). But sinS (plural) are always the deeds of a person carrying this "curved-back trademark."
5. This "shape of my person" is what sin really is, and it "even now damns and brings eternal death" (since it is a turn-way from God, the source of Eternal Life) to those who are not "born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit."
6. Pelagius, fifth century opponent of Augustine, denied this teaching about original sin. His teaching was not only false doctrine about human sinfulness, but also a Christological heresy since it "diminish[es] the glory of Christ's merits and benefits."

Note here how even the doctrine of original sin [o.s.] is connected to Christ, the Gospel-hub of the wagon wheel.

Roman Confutation on Art. II

Four statements:

1. On one point AC II is OK: Original sin really is sin. It carries deadly consequences. Pelagians who deny this really are to be condemned.
2. However, Confutators reject the statement “not fearing God and not trusting God is o.s.” It’s not ORIGINAL sin, it’s ACTUAL sin. It’s an action. Adults do that, but not infants. You have to have the “use of reason” in order to “not fear God and not trust God.”
3. Confutators reject “calling o.s. concupiscence,” if that means that concup. remains in a person after baptism.
4. If the Confessors mean to say that o.s. is concupiscence, but baptism does indeed take concup. away –as Augustine said–then their statement is OK.

Apology Article II

Melanchthon is angry at the response given to AC II by the RC theologians (“lacking in honesty, quibbles, sophistry,” he says). Yet from these quibbles by the Confutators we see their completely different picture of o.s.

The “fight” centers around the technical term “concupiscence.” For the RCs concupiscence is “the inclination to evil” arising from human bodily existence. This is the psycho-somatic stuff–the drives, appetites, the bio-chemical urges–that humans have just like other mammals. In the Confutators’ perspective, these psycho-biological drives are “normal” and therefore they are OK, so long as they are kept under control and channelled into rightful expression. [E.g., Sex drive rightfully channelled into marriage.]

In class we distributed a New Yorker cartoon handout about “7 deadly sins.” It shows the classic seven–greed, lust, pride, gluttony, sloth, wrath, envy–as exaggerations, unrestrained

exaggerations, of these 7 normal human “needs.” For the Confutators the term “concupiscence” designates these “drives” in every human being. They are OK unless they get out of control. When they get out of control, they become sin. Sin is fundamentally “misbehaving.”

For the Reformers the word concup. has nothing to do with biology. It is the label for the “normal” lifestyle of an incurved sinner, where my energy is used to live to the fullest the “incurved life.” It can be done with a very moral life (e.g., Pharisees in NT times) without any misbehaving at all. Concupiscence is a Latin term [cupere = Latin for “to desire.” The “con” prefix intensifies the meaning of the verb – “really” desire]. The Greek term shows up often in two terms in the NT. Example: In Romans 7:5 where Paul talks of “patheemata,” – usually translated “sinful passions” and in 7:7 “epithymia” – a yen, desire, longing, craving, an “I want,” – often translated “coveting.” [In class on Jan. 26 I hope to take a look at Galatians 5:24 which contains both of these Greek words .]

Melanchthon labels original sin an “inclination,” but does not confine it to our biological urges. Sin, he claims, is the inclination of our entire person—all 100% of me has the inclination, the slant, the tilt, not to fear nor to trust in God, but to curve everything back into myself.

The Confutators’ notion was that sin is a defect, some damage done to human beings, with Adam and Eve as the ones who did it. The damage is focused on the “control mechanisms” designed to manage those biological urges. Adam and Eve’s original “undamaged” humanity was their “original righteousness,” – no misbehaving, everything managed according to God’s specs. But in the fall into sin they lost that “upper-level management.” Now all human beings enter the world with a “defect,” as damaged goods. However, this “damage,” though serious, is not so lethal

tht it cannot be fixed. Damaged goods can be repaired. It is like a car that has been banged up in a traffic accident. An automobile shop can fix it so that it runs like new again.

Apology 2 say: No, sin is like a car that has been "totalled." No repair will fix it. The whole thing is smashed up. Apology 2 operates with Biblical images: "dead" in trespasses and sins, "enemies" of God, in "bondage, slavery, imprisoned" to sin. All those are total terms. They cover 100% of the human person. Needed here is not "repairs" of some damaged part, but something completely new and different, totally opposite, from being dead, enemy, enslaved. A 100% re-creation. You don't "repair" a dead body, an enemy, a slave. Each needs a 100% total change: from dead to alive, from enemy to ally, from slavery to freedom.

Apology 2 claims that the Confutation "minimizes" o.s. (makes it small). And when o.s. is made small, much smaller than it really is, what else gets "minimized?" Right! Christ is made small too. Note how often Melanchthon connects these two items, a "small" doctrine of sin and "small" need for Christ. See these numbered marginal paragraphs in the text of Apol 2: paragraphs 10, 33, 44, 48, 50. Here we see the full Gospel-grounding even of the doctrine of o.s. in Lutheran Reformation theology.

Sometimes Apology 2 refers to "higher powers" and "lower" ones in humankind. That distinction refers to the two-story notion of humans—going all the way back to Aristotle. The "lower" stuff is the biological drives, the bottom floor, the stuff shown in that 7-deadly sins cartoon where these drives have gone berserk, out of control. The "higher" stuff refers to the next story above that bottom floor: human reason, spirit, creativity, human will, etc., the "stuff" that makes humans more than just animals, the stuff that keeps the lower stuff in bounds. The Apology says sin shows up in both parts of the human self—higher and lower—not just the lower part as the Confutators claimed. 'Fact is, it's

in these “higher” realms that original sin is most manifest. It is in the human head and human heart that we practice our “not fearing God, not trusting God, and curving into ourselves.”

Fruitful here was to ask: What is the understanding of sin in current American culture? Both American secular culture and American church culture? On this issue, which of the two views on sin debated at Augsburg has won the day?

Apology 2 is asking: “If it took a crucified and risen Messiah to get sinners un-sinned, then how bad must the sin problem really be?” The Augsburg Confessors hear the Confutation saying: “It is bad, but it can’t be THAT bad.”

The next two AC articles—3 and 4 on Christ and Justification—bring us to the “Augsburg Aha!” on how sinners get un-sinned. AC 3 says: Christ alone does it. AC 4 says sinners receive it by faith alone. On both counts the Confutators say: No way! Stay tuned.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Lord’s Supper Liturgies

Colleagues,

Last week’s gift from a bunch of you supplying the celebrative text for the 500th edition of ThTh is still being “processed” by yours truly. Count it all joy! is the apostolic adage that’s fitting. The presence of the word promise (8 times—I counted!) in your prose was kudos enough to commemorate half-a-thousand

postings. Hype tossed in my direction I enjoyed, but sought to be humble.

I don't expect to complete another 500 and make it all the way to a thousand, because more and more body parts have been wearing out during the first half-thousand. But I'll resist giving you an "organ recital" to name those parts, and I won't predict anything, nor tell you when I intend to retire from this strange and wonderful vocation. Instead, think of this: just for fun I've counted ahead 500 weeks on the calendar—and then added ten more. Guess where I landed. October 31, 2017, the 500th anniversary of Luther's posting the 95 theses. So here is a prediction: ThTh #1010—if, d.v., the tradition continues—will itself be dated "Reformation Day 500."

So let's start heading toward 2017 with a look at the Lord's Supper Liturgy in our new "cranberry-colored" ELCA book of worship, "Evangelical Lutheran Worship" [ELW]. In the ELW a new item has come in for regular Sunday repetition in the communion liturgy. In the first few months of using it at our parish communions there was so much that was new that I didn't notice it. But now I have. It wasn't there in the old "green" Lutheran Book of Worship [LBW]. Nor, so far as I know, was it present in any of the "even older" books used in the PCBs [predecessor church bodies] that merged to form the ELCA a generation ago. It's in the eucharistic prayer.

After the words of institution and the versicle/response where the people sing "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again," we pray thus: "Remembering, therefore, his salutary command, his life-giving passion and death, his glorious resurrection and ascension, and the promise of his coming again, we give thanks to you, O Lord God Almighty, not as we ought but as we are able; we ask you mercifully to accept our praise and thanksgiving and with your Word and Holy Spirit to bless us,

your servants, and these your own gifts of bread and wine, so that we and all who share in the body and blood of Christ may be filled with heavenly blessing and grace, and, receiving the forgiveness of sin, may be formed to live as your holy people and be given our inheritance with all your saints. To you, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory in your holy church, now and forever." After which the people respond with the triple Amen. (Settings 1 and 2 – pp. 109, 131) In the remaining eight settings for the Holy Communion no eucharistic prayer text is proposed. The rubric says "The presiding minister continues, using an appropriate form."

The words that perplex, and then vex, are "not as we ought but as we are able." No big deal? Boilerplate? Throw-away line? I don't think so. Seems to me these nine words diminish the Gospel. Here's how. Let's take the scenic route.

When the (now "old") LBW was being put together 30 years ago, there was debate about the Lutheran-ness of a eucharistic prayer at all in the communion liturgy. Some folks were opposed to it, but they didn't carry the day. I had my own theological reasons for siding with that minority, but I wasn't in any place where my opinion made any difference. So the eucharistic prayer became LBW standard operating procedure. Seldom have I ever been celebrant in these 3 decades. I took it in stride, although occasionally twitching now and then as it was recited Sunday mornings. Sometimes I mumbled to myself the shibboleths of Augsburg Confession theology that do not recommend placing Christ's body-and-blood promise to us within a text of our talking to God.

Those mumblings went something like this. If the means-of-grace called "Gospel-proclamation" (aka sermon) is God talking to us and not the other way round, then God "ritually addressing us with the promise" (aka sacrament)—as one of you said in last

week's festival posting—is the same. The proper posture for receiving a promise is listening, not talking. That signals the posture of receptivity, not activity, even prayerful activity.

I don't always repress the impious thought that when the promissory words of Christ's creating the sacrament are embedded in a prayer we address to God, we are reminding God of what he promised. As though God might have forgotten. That is hardly what Jesus meant with his words "do this in remembrance of me." There is no recorded "lapse of memory" on God's part, but with us it happens day in day out. We are the ones who need to hear it again. So we should be listeners. We are the ones who need to be reminded of how God remembers us, namely, remembers us on the receiving end of the body and blood of God's own Beloved One. Yes, "eucharistia – God, I thank thee" is proper response—but hardly proper when the benefactor is passing the promise to us in word and ritual. To receive a promise it is the ears (the channel to human hearts), not the tongue, that is to be engaged. When it comes to the mouth, it is for eating and drinking, not talking.

But I digress. That was my spiel 30 years ago—though I think it still has merit.

Back to the ELW texts. Riled by the "not as we ought but as we are able," I snooped around some more and made other discoveries.

There are a number of items different in ELW's new "standard" version for the eucharistic prayer. For one, the "epiklesis," present in all three of the communion settings in the old LBW, is gone. That Greek word designates the "calling in, calling upon" the Holy Spirit to engage us in this liturgy. That's a major element in Eastern Orthodox liturgies. Hence the Greek name for it. The LBW's version—toned down from the heftier (and

theologically possibly different) Orthodox version—said: “Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit , the spirit of our Lord and of his resurrection, that we who receive the Lord’s body and blood may live to the praise of your glory and receive our inheritance with all your saints in light.” This is gone in ELW’s prose.

I think there are good “Gospel” reasons for its absence. I wonder what prompted the ELW experts to remove it. My reason would be that in the Lord’s Supper—in the words of Augsburg Confession V—the Holy Spirit is already present and in action—by definition. No need to invoke the Holy Spirit via some other mode. ‘Fact is, that was the Augsburg Confessors’ critique of the Reformation Left-Wingers, the “radicals,” the “Schwaermer.” These folks expected the Holy Spirit to operate like a lightning bolt—zap!—without any patent “instrument” of mediation. Au contraire, said the Augsburgers: “Through the proclaimed Gospel and the sacraments, as through means, God gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear that Gospel.”

For Augsburg-confessors it is almost frivolous to ask God to send the Holy Spirit right in the middle of a liturgy where God is doing just that. So epiklesis farewell. The Lord’s Supper is ipso facto exactly such a coming of the Holy Spirit to those receiving it. Christ’s promise “given and shed for you” IS the Holy Spirit present and in action. Epiklesis farewell!

That’s what I thought until I took a closer look at the ELW. The epiklesis returns in two alternate eucharistic prayers tucked in alongside the primary text, one for the time of “Advent to the Epiphany of our Lord,” and one for “Ash Wednesday to Day of Pentecost.” In the former the Holy Spirit is invoked once, in the latter twice. Why this back-sliding? For what theological reason? Is it a signal of no confidence that Christ will indeed keep his promise when we hear his invitation and do

indeed “take and eat...and drink?” What—yes, what on earth—are we asking for in requests like these: “Holy God, we long for your Spirit. Come among us. Bless this meal.”

Might the Holy God not respond: “Hey, dummies, don’t you know what this Lord’s Supper is all about? What do you expect my ‘blessing’ to add to what I am already offering you in the very body and blood of my beloved Son? Have you forgotten what the bread-and-wine-and-word offer is? If so, check your own Lutheran catechism.” And when we do, what do we find? “What is the gift in the Lord’s Supper? Answer: We are told in these words ‘for you’ and ‘for the forgiveness of sins.’ By these words the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are GIVEN to us in the sacrament, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there are also life and salvation.”

To put it gently—not usually my strong suit—there is confusion about the gospel in the Lord’s Supper in the ELW’s liturgies even as they seek to promote and elevate eucharistic life in the ELCA. A Gospel-confused liturgy does not increase eucharistic piety.

And then there is the conundrum I started with above with the new words here highlighted: “Remembering, therefore, his salutary command, his life-giving passion and death, his glorious resurrection and ascension, and the promise of his coming again, we give thanks to you, O Lord God Almighty, NOT AS WE OUGHT BUT AS WE ARE ABLE.”

I wonder: how did the “not as we ought but as we are able” sneak into the eucharistic prayer in the cranberry book? It was blessedly absent in the LBW. I know that it’s standard prose in the liturgy of American Episcopalians. Is that one reason for its adoption into the ELW—in order to be ecumenically convivial?

To get to the theological reasons for saying “no” to these nine

words may seem circuitous. But bear with me. The grounds are no less substantive—according to Lutheran theological rubrics—than they are for questioning the epiklesis in the Lord's Supper celebration.

As soon as you are talking about "oughts" you are into ethics. In Lutheran ethics there are "law imperatives and Gospel imperatives." "L.imps" are always reciprocal. There's a pay-back linked to the imperative. "Do this good thing and you get a good reward. Do this forbidden thing, and you get punished." The grammar is: "If ..., then . . ." "If YOU do such and so, then GOD will do such and so" in reciprocal fairness—tit for tat. We humans are the sentence-subject in the first clause, God in the second. God's response is conditional depending on our performance.

"G.imps" are different. No less imperative, they do indeed say: "Do this, don't do that." But it's no longer framed in reciprocal grammar. Instead it's Gospel-grammar: "Because God . . . , therefore you" Note also this reversal: God is in the first clause, we are in the second. "BECAUSE God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, THEREFORE be reconciled to God and to one another." The first clause is the grounds for the second clause happening. Nothing conditional here. Just the opposite. No pay-back for performance. God offers something good, very good, unconditionally. We receive it as the freebee it is. No pay-back here either. Then comes the imperative: GO for it! You CAN do it. This ought is 100% fulfill-able.

Now back to the "ought" of thanksgiving in the Lord's Supper—is it L.imp or G.imp? That question "ought" to be a no-brainer. Of course, it's a G.imp. Is the ought of this Gospel imperative do-able—all the way—not just "as we are able?" Of course. Christ-connected sinners are fully "able" to do the oughts of G.imps. "Not as we ought but as we are able" violates the grammar—and

the theology—of Gospel imperatives.

Just what are we telling God in the prayer text after we've just told him that we are indeed following Christ's "remembrance" command—"remembering his life-giving passion and death, his glorious resurrection and ascension"—when we then say our thanksgiving will not be as we ought, but "merely" as we are able? Is that a vote of no confidence in the just-remembered gift, or what? Votes of no confidence are votes of no faith. "Faith," namely, sinners-trusting-Christ's-promise, so say the Augsburg Confessors umpteen times, is itself "the highest worship," 100% perfect thanksgiving. BECAUSE of Christ, THEREFORE this "ought" is indeed one that we are "able" to carry out 100%. To indicate that we can't carry through on this grace-imperative is—to use one of Apology 4's harshest critiques—"minimizing the magnitude of the grace of Christ."

Some other spin-offs:

- A. All of the "grace-imperatives" in the NT are do-able. 100%. It's a major point in the Lutheran Reformation, fundamental to the Gospel-grounded ethics confessed at Augsburg in 1530. By contrast Rome made no distinction between L.imps and G.imps. "Oughts" were all of one sort. All of them fundamentally "legal" in the grammar of reciprocity, all of them meriting reward, all of them understood under the rubric "not as we ought but as we are able." All of them also coupled with seeing God as generically gracious. So much so that "to do what you are able" (*facere quod in se est*, the Latin mantra) would suffice to merit God's favor. It all hangs, of course, on the 100% perfect worship/liturgy that "faith," first of all, IS—and then ongoingly enables. Right smack-dab in the middle of the eucharistic prayer, this "ought" is surely a Gospel-imperative. If with Paul we "can do all things

through Christ who strengthens" us too, then this imperative is surely one of them.

- B. Not perfectly do-able, of course, are the "law's imperatives" in both OT and NT. For them the "not as we ought, but as we are able" might well apply, but in that case it would not be such a throw-away line, as it seems to be here in the eucharistic prayer. As though not fulfilling the "ought" would be not-so-bad, and God would be nice-guy and say "well, you did do it as you were able, so OK." That minimizes both God's law and God's promise.
- C. So, no surprise, here again it's an issue on the proper distinction twixt law and promise—the cantus firmus of the entire 60 pp. of Apology 4. Also with reference to worship. So there are law-imperatives and grace-imperatives, and to confuse them, though it happens a zillion times a day—also in Christian life and (sob!) liturgy—is a BEEEG mistake. The Gospel gets diminished.
- D. In the Holy Communion sinners who fall short every time on law-imperatives—right from the git-go with the super-impossible numero uno commandment—are being enabled not only to fulfill that otherwise impossible demand by their faith in Christ, but also the whole bevy of "new" commands that come under the NT Greek term "paraenesis," the Grace-imperatives.
- E. As mentioned above there's a sticky-wicket about having a eucharistic prayer at all in Lutheran liturgies. These nine words, however, seem to me to be asking us to swim the Tiber back to Rome—or the Thames to Canterbury—or wherever. I don't think you can get those nine words about eucharistic piety out of Wittenberg on the Elbe.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Ed Schroeder's Thursday Theologies: The Gospel, God's Plus for Us

As you search the digital tracks of 500 weeks of Thursday Theologies, you will see that not one is less than 3 printed pages. That means that Ed Schroeder has treated us to 1,500-plus pages of literature over the past 10 years. Emphasis on the plus.

Also, you will see that there is no index of the Thursday Theologies either-which is a shame. Yet, seven being a holy number, we think we have outlined all of Ed's writings into seven main groups (plus or minus a few-but probably emphasis again on the plus).

1. Things Lutheran, including theology (confessional teachings), church institutions (ELCA, LCMS, Seminex), presses (The Lutheran)
2. Ecumenism and ecumenical agreements (Catholics, Episcopalians, Reformed, etc.).
3. International missiology (Ed and Marie being two of the finest missiologists)
4. Politics (and repentance)
5. Book reviews
6. Sexuality studies (both homosexual and heterosexual)
7. Preaching the Gospel (sermons, and reflections on the theme of the church year)

You're welcome to add to the list. We are not offering an index

here, however.

In all of the Thursday Theologies, Ed rarely stopped to reflect on where all these Thursday sharings were going. He just wrote, and wrote some more, or passed the baton to others. For example, he shared the writings of Thursday Theology with junior and senior colleagues alike, and was always genuinely interested in what other people had to say about it all-even inviting and sharing his reader's responses. Nor did Ed write in one place. Many of his offerings came from his home on Russell Blvd. in St. Louis, but it was not unusual to hear from Ed from such diverse places as Singapore, Ethiopia, the Holy Land, Denmark, or New Haven, Connecticut (Yale Divinity School). Significantly, no matter what the topic of the day might be, none of them were able to so "stump him" that he couldn't see how a sprout (the stem of Jesse) might emerge from it. That is to say, he often used those topics as "hooks" to get his readers interested, and interest he did pique, but not interest simply in the topic of the day, but how that topic was always entrée to the topic of the gospel.

Once, however, Ed gave a summary. In Thursday Theology #185. "Topic: Year End's Summary: the Hassle about the Gospel." That came as his last offering in 2001. You may recall the year mostly for "9/11". Ed, however, sees the more perennial theme even here-and maybe just provided his own summary for all his Thursday Theologies.

"Seems to me [you can hear Ed's high-pitched voice already] that the Hassle about the Gospel has been the dominant thread in this year's postings. Frequent themes-homosexuality, historic episcopate, church building programs, mission theology, preaching, and those two months worth of repentance postings-were finally variations on 'Just what is the Gospel, and what is it not.' It's all been about the farm-wagon wheel that I learned

to use for imaging 'good' theology, when I was a classroom theology prof... All the spokes of the Christian wheel must fit into the hub, aka the Gospel, must be socketed, grounded in that hub, or they don't belong in the Christian wheel. They are spokes from some other wheel-of which there are many. Many other wheels are rolling around and through Christian churches nowadays, Lutheran churches included."

Of course! In fact, Ed's "wagon-wheel" of confessing Christian theology (which Lutheranism is at its best, which is rare) is grounded in the Gospel at the center, from which emanates all the other spokes. Ed's "wagon-wheel" diagram is a staple of appreciating the Augsburg Confession aright.

But in case you missed it (it being "the Gospel") in #185, you can see it again in ThTh #253: "Topic: The Eastering of Robert W. Bertram." That came out on Maundy Thursday of 2003, the year Bob made his final crossing, to which Ed offers his own "requiem" (or "encomium"-warm, glowing praise). He begins with these words: "At Luther's funeral, Philip Melanchthon was the preacher. His most poignant words were: 'Most of all I thank God for Martin Luther because he taught me the Gospel.'" Ed's reflections brought him to comment on the displayed 8-foot banner at Bob's memorial liturgy which was used at "many a Seminex procession," which "boldly proclaims: 'We shall rise OUR LORD to meet, treading DEATH beneath our feet.'" Ed concludes: "In the Bertram version, 'Life is not win/lose. Nor is it win/win, says Jesus. It's lose/lose. But there are two different ways to lose! One is hanging onto your life like this [arms clutched around self] and that is Lose-PERIOD! The other is giving your life away [hands extended palms open] connected to Christ. You still lose your life, but this losing is Lose-COMMA. And there is another clause coming.' Today we mark God's COMMA to the life of blessed Bob. The rest of the sentence of Bob's life story is on the banner. The Gospel is in that comma. Bob

taught me the Gospel.”

So what were all those thousands of pages over 10 years about? What’s the real “plus” of Ed’s Thursday Theologies?

That’s simple.

The Gospel.

And that emphasis on the Gospel is what the other 14 contributors to milestone ThTh #500 below also “got,” and specifically from Ed.

Just don’t “plus” the Gospel with something “other” or “alien.” Ed helped to fend that off, week-after-week, Thursday-after-Thursday. That’s what has made Thursday Theology so rewarding and renewing to us all. It brought us b ack to the hub of the wagon-wheel, what Bob and Ed, and Martin and Philip, and all saints before and after and now have in common: confessing the Gospel of Jesus the Christ.

Thanks, Ed, for so confessing.

Michael Hoy

President, Crossings Community, 1995-1999

Steven C. Kuhl

President, Crossings Community, 1999-Present

The Epiphany of our Lord 2008

Contributions for ThTh 500

1. DAVID BOEDECKER

I am a relative late-comer to Crossings but have to come to appreciate its thought-provoking proddings and pokings.

I am an LCMess product, prepped at Concordia Milwaukee and was one of the last classes ('75) to have been privileged to have been a part of the Ft. Wayne (Indiana) Senior College community. You know, after all the fighting of the 70s, the bitter fruits of which we are still swallowing, your crossing my life and my pastoral ministry has been a true blessing. Thanks to you I can stop saying "I shoulda gone to Seminex" and live instead in the present and enjoy your gift of Crossings. I remember the "they are taking away our Bible" ranting of President Preus et al but ironically if you all "took away our Bible," you have always honored and proclaimed our Christ. MANY THANKS FOR THE BLESSINGS THAT YOU HAVE SENT MY WAY. Rev. David Boedecker,
Marshall, Michigan.

2. DEAN LUEKING

Ed Schroeder's gentle kick in the rear to us who read TTh regularly but contribute irregularly moves me to speak up. For the past two years I have been on the road much of the time, looking up Lutherans on various continents and asking this lead question: "What does it mean to be a Lutheran Christian in this place?" In places where Christians are under heavy pressure, Bethlehem in the Holy Land is a prime example, the answer comes through loud and clear – "grace" and generous witness to Jesus crucified and risen for us as the content of grace. In Africa as well, Tanzania comes to mind, the clarity of Christ as sufficient for salvation is what I heard often from Lutherans who live where other prosperity gospels abound (of which we have more than our share here). And, come to think of it, in an interview with the former prime minister of Norway, Kjell Bondevik, I heard one of the clearest statements ever of justification by faith as the heart of his vocation as a statesman. In too many other

places that I know anything about, the witness of Lutherans is more murky than clear, too often lost in fussing with other Lutherans.

In not a few of these places around the world Ed and Marie have gone to teach and preach, and wherever I have traced their steps they are well remembered. Can we clone Ed Schroeder export? It's been pure grace to know him as friend and classmate since earlier in the last century, and what is best about this durable friendship is the true-north-on-the-compass effect that his Gospel centering always exerts. Now, lest you take my words as Ed-pleasing, Edward, let me push you to push for more ThTh testimony to what Gospel centeredness looks like in the lived ministries of God's people – laity as we call them – in the daily life of the world.

Peace and Joy!
Dean Lueking

3. CLIFF BISCHOFF

Greetings, This is from Cliff Bischoff, Concordia Seminary, St Louis, class of 1971.

What can I say? Congratulations. Best wishes. Gottes Segen.

I discovered the web site a few months ago. You have brought back to me pleasant and unpleasant memories. I was at Carl Meyer's funeral and Dr Piepkorn's funeral and a few others. My pastoral pilgrimage at Bethesda (Pine Lawn, a St. Louis suburb) was from 1971 until 1980. I was privileged to see first hand the voluminous papers of Dr Piepkorn, being acquainted at that time with the archivist who was working on the project. WOW! What a life he had!

But irony of ironies I hope to retire in St Louis in the not so distant future. How about lunch? We certainly have much to talk about! But is that what the old guys do? Talk about the past? But to fail to understand the past is to fail the future. The story of the past needs to be told. I am not much of a writer but have much to say including being an uninvited observer at a Voter Meeting where the Office of Head Pastor was abolished in order to get rid of the Pastor. What a night that was!

I am not sure what you were looking for but here it is. Thank you for what you are contributing and doing. Perhaps in a few months I can add to the dialogue.

4. DON SCHEDLER

I have been so emboldened by the teaching of ThTh over the years that I finally wrote something for it – a book review of Culture Warrior, by Bill O'Reilly. In the editing process ye old editor taught me some more things. I see that Culture Warrior has become a best seller again in the paperback edition. Concern for the culture there seems to be – whether O'Reilly has good answers is still a question. Is it too tangential to remind that Nietzsche said, “If we know the WHY we can stand any HOW {read ‘culture’}” [emphasis added], but a theologian (I wish I had the attribution), summarizing the book of Job, said, “If we know the WHO, we can stand any HOW {read ‘culture’} even if we do not know the WHY.” [emphasis added.]

5. MARCUS FELDE

I have an inkling that James (of the letter of James) was the original Sabbatheologian. Is it possible (at least) that the practice of programming the pericopes could salvage even the epistle of straw? Perhaps, if Luther had had the advantage of our “Chi-Ray” vision, he might not

have been so dismissive? Note that James provides neat diagnosis and prognosis terms for us, in chapter one.

Diagnosis: "[W]hen desire (Step 2) has conceived, it gives birth to sin (Step 1), and . . . sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death (Step 3)." (James 1:15)

Prognosis: "[H]e gave us birth by the word of truth." (1:18, Step 4) So that we might be "hearers of the Word" (1:23, Step 5) and also "doers of the Word" (1:22, Step 6).

In other words, although James does indeed speak most of the time out of the sixth box, he is not oblivious to boxes 1-5. Death-Birth are apposite at the "eternal" level, "(other) desires" and being hearers of the Word are the "internal" poles, and the external opposites are sin and "doing the Word." Perhaps the rest of the letter should be read in the light of this grid?

6. JEFF ANDERSON

Ed, I am not sure what will "fit the bill" for your "celebration text" so I offer a few, and you can pick one or none. First a play on the Veni-Vidi-Vici theme with a Crossings twist:

I came, I saw, I conquered
I conquered, I ruled, I died.

He came, he saw, he died,
He lives, he calls me, I rise.

Second, a little model that came to me on Christmas Eve when I sat in the "Festival Service" feeling a bit melancholy:

The meaninglessness of life fades when I commit myself in

the moment to a phrase of the creed, like “on the third day He rose again” or “He suffered”, because then each century of hard-wrought doctrine becomes mine.

Finally, a limerick, of all things, that fits the season (note: “blue” does not refer to the sky, but is the down to earth color the church has often used to symbolize the Blessed Virgin Mary):

Humankind was in a dense dither
All running yon, thither and hither.
When out of the “blue”
Came a Word that said, You
Are my child through the Christ now forever.

7. CARL UCHTMANN

The secular world still obsesses with vengeance and violence. The Gospel is inherently justice and mercy. Unfortunately much of theological jargon is still hung up on Aristotelian logic, the logic of ABSOLUTES!!!! Not willing to dialog about quantum logic. This Eli Wiesel classifies as contextual violence to Holy Writ. I. e., centuries before the gospel: “Vengeance is mine!!!!!! saith the LORD!!!!!! And a comment [from Jesus] which always comes to mind: “I am come not to replace the Law, but to fulfill it.” Anyway one struggles to approach a God composed of absolutes which admittedly involves (as does quantum math and physics) many ambiguities.

Recognizing that in planet earth’s “time” dimensions one can only see “through the glass darkly,” but in cosmic dimensions (which Einstein discerned while imagining himself riding on the lightwave) are timeless!!!! Hallelujah. I.e., I AM (JHWH) Amen.

8. BRITA PARK

As a beneficiary of the most recent twenty-two ThTh postings, let my clip be a THANK-YOU, ED! My father, as you know, died in May 2006, and since then all of his children are re-discovering so many dimensions of his rich and multifaceted 92 years. Relevant to this “thank-you, Ed” is that my father instilled in us the understanding that a literate Christian doesn’t have to bemoan the fact that we at times are fed “mediocre theology” on a Sunday morning, and self-pityingly slip into a lukewarm pattern of thought and in-action. He felt that one can/must go after the “Schwarzbrot”, [Ed: “black-bread” = “real” bread in the culture of this German refugee-family from Riga, Latvia] the challenging, nourishing, tough “chew”, which doesn’t disappear into fluff after the Sunday service, but sustains us in our Monday world. And the sources of such real bread are many. Living in rural western Canada for the last 55 years of his life, he collected (and read daily!) the writings of Bonhoeffer—his guiding “mentor”. On his bookshelf I also found Karl Barth’s sermons to prisoners, the sermon by Berlin Bishop Dibelius, “The Prodigal Son’s Return to his Father’s House,” delivered 3 August, 1947, in the Marienkirche in Berlin, and on and on. For 55 years my parents never missed a Sunday church service at St. John’s Lutheran [Oliver, British Columbia], unless physically prevented to do so, by a rare illness or even rarer snowstorm. They loved the liturgy, the hymns, the communion, and many of the sermons. On the occasional Sunday when Papa felt he was served “fluff-bread”, he would choose a sermon from his bookshelf, and read it to us over Sunday dinner. This past summer, when you and Marie visited us in Oliver, and opened up the possibility of receiving your ThTh postings, as well as the Sabbath theology, I was delighted. For me, this electronic

means has become a weekly source of "Schwarzbrot". THANK-YOU, ED! from Brita

9. PAUL ROWOLD

What does prophecy look like today? We are familiar with contemporary preaching and worship, modern (and post-modern) theology, ecumenism and missiology for the 21st Century. But the work of prophets is difficult to distinguish from age to age—prophecy does not lend itself to typologies (or any other ways to tame it, for that matter). The vision that marks genuine prophecy transcends time and cultural trends—it has that "you know it when you hear it" quality. Crossings has that quality. And those through whom Crossings prophecy comes (even that hi-pitched voice who throws Gospel-wallets at clueless students) [=a classroom trick of EHS when he was younger and more foolish] are what prophets look like today. Thanks, Ed and all who contribute to Crossings! Many join me in looking forward to the millennium mark!

Paul Rowold
Polson, Montana

10. BILL BURROWS

As I've read Ed's Thursday Theology notes, I've been undergoing a slow conversion to seeing "promise" as key to the meaning of the gospel and the church's mission. Sitting in church one Sunday in the Fall of 2007, as I listened to readings taken from Isaiah, Paul, and Luke, it hit me hard that promise is one of the key elements uniting the two testaments. Ed's espousal of that theme hit home in a quiet moment, and I realized that it wasn't Ed saying this to me. The Holy Spirit was, too. And as I was reading the Canons on the Sacraments in General from the Council of Trent one day more recently, it dawned on

me that the theologians of Trent had a pretty fair idea of what was key to Brother Martin. It was amazing how they stated clearly Luther's position in Canon 8 (accepted in 1547). I think they realized that if he were right, the entire sacerdotal system needed to be revisioned and revised. The canon states: "If any one says that through the sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred by the performance of the rite itself (*ex opere operato*) but that faith alone in the divine promise is sufficient to obtain grace, anathema sit!" Returning to the truth that what we are responding to in faith is the "who" behind God's promise would have propelled Catholics to leave the semi-magical realm of mythic sacerdotal arcana into the realm of the community and the individual responding in trust to God's Word. Had we (Protestants and Catholics) been capable of dialoguing about that presupposition, the Reformation could have become the beginning of a reformation of the whole church and not forced to become a breakaway movement. The one who writes these words is a Roman Catholic, I should confess.

And I think it's important to understand that responding to promises embodied in rites can be at least as powerful as responding to words. The whole church needs a renewal of worship because one of the negative things that's happened since the Reformation is the domination by professional theologians of who gets to say what counts. Theologians are mostly good people but they make their living piling word upon word upon word, and have themselves become a new hierarchy, extremely jealous when their own guild's authority is challenged. The result in both Protestantism and Catholicism is a too frequent inability to recognize or respect the mysterious process whereby the Spirit empowers either the rites or/and words – alone or together – to embody the Word and draw the seer

and hearer to the God whose second self is the Word incarnate mediated by God's third self, the Holy Spirit. (I borrow here the wonderful phraseology of Bishop N T Wright.)

Ed Schroeder and Thursday Theology's "Tischreden" have become a wonderful companion for this seeker who seeks to draw forth wisdom from both the Reformation and Roman Catholic traditions in much the way the wise householder draws out both old things and new from his warehouse (Matthew 13: 52).

Bill Burrows, Managing Editor

Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY

11. ALBERT JABS

Fear and hope...the diapason of all history...the fears and hopes of all the years...beginnings and endings...by the Holy Spirit's prompting...may even in this short paragraph...capture on cyberspace...in the waning hours of the old and new year...a luminous Eternal Light of Christ...that half of a thousand messages and reflecting millions of words that...deep darkness cannot diminish. Dr. Albert E. Jabs,

Lexington, South Carolina

12. STEVE HITCHCOCK

I've had the good fortune to have been a student of Ed Schroeder's for 40 years now – starting out as newly-minted 18-year old in a freshman theology course at Valparaiso University. I graduated from Seminex and spent another five years working for "church-related organizations." The rest of the time, I've worked as an executive in two small companies engaged in publishing and consulting. Somehow, thanks in large part to Ed, I've been

able to continue my theological education, reading publications and at least a couple books each year. I've also participated in a small Lutheran parish that hangs on to the very edges of American Lutheranism, in Berkeley, California.

I say all of this not to brag but to provide some context for my contribution to Thursday Theology 500. My hope is that my three observations will provoke commentary from Ed or from others in the Thursday Theology "seminar."

1. It wasn't until 2001, when I read Bernard Lohse's Martin Luther's Theology, that I "understood" justification by faith (i.e. hanging on to Christ) – the heart of Luther's theology. I'm sure that I experienced saving faith many times before that "Aha!" But it certainly took a long time to sink in. From a few of my seminary classmates whom I've kept in touch with, I know many others don't organize their ministries around a law-gospel/threat-promise hermeneutic. My question is, "Why is all this very good news so difficult to comprehend?" Ed makes it all seem so simple and practical when he writes or talks, but few others do. Shouldn't "justification by faith" be more immediately accessible?
2. My other observation from the edges of the Lutheran world is that sustaining a life of faith takes time and intentionality. In this society at this time, other messages and other activities overwhelm and contradict any good news that is spoken. One solution is to remove oneself – at least for a time. The good news seems so much more winsome in places like Holden, Lutheran School of Theology, or the dozen or so (maybe 100) of "lively parishes" that encourage worship, study, and reflection. Isn't this

a rather fragile foundation for the Gospel? With such small and segregated outposts, how can the good news be heard and believed here in the United States?

3. My third observation is that this believing business has become professionalized. In the congregation where I worship, at least two-thirds of the members are clergy, were once clergy, were at least theologically educated, married to clergy, or have parents or siblings who were are clergy. In my daily life work, I'm involved in lots of nonprofit organizations, some of them church-related. I'm struck that clergy are over-represented in these organizations. Can the institutional church, to say nothing of the Gospel, continue if it is just a professional association of theologically-trained individuals and their relatives?

Perhaps the question behind these three questions is how can a threat-promise theology engage the larger culture in which we live here in the United States? What words, stories, and concepts can make this more than the work of a professional guild that has the time and temperament for what seems to be intellectually challenging? How can more people – who rush about in our consumer society with hardly any biblical literacy and certainly no liturgical refinement – hear the good news that creates the faith that saves?

13. RICHARD KOENIG

“Particularly for those called to a life of ministry within the church, 2 Timothy poses some powerful challenges. It proposes that ministry is not a career choice, but a call from God to become holy. Neither is ministry a body of lore to communicate or a set of skills

to exercise, but a matter of living in a certain manner that expresses one's deepest convictions in consistent patterns of behavior. Transformation of character or, if one prefers, continuing conversion is the very essence of ministry, as it is of discipleship. Carrying out acts of ministry without the corresponding affections is a form of counterfeiting, to 'have the form of piety while denying its power' (3:5). Ministry, furthermore, is not measured by success, but by fidelity. Ministry demands witnessing to uncomfortable and unpopular truths in the face of indifference and disagreement. Ministry inevitably involves suffering if the gospel is truly lived and rightly proclaimed. The minister labors in a hope not of reward or recognition in this life but in a hope of sharing the resurrection life. Not one of these truths is supported by present-day culture. Few of them are supported by the church. The voice of 2 Timothy is not a voice that lulls Christians into a comfortable security. but one that speaks with the urgency of prophecy, calling for witnesses to truth in an age that prefers teachers who cater to its desires (4:3)."(L.T. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 35A), New York, Doubleday, 2001, p. 330)

A quote shared by Richard Koenig, Cromwell, Connecticut, for Thursday Theology #500 for January 10, 2008

14. FREDERICK NIEDNER

Just a line for the ThTh #500. . . I do aerobics and weight training three or four times a week to keep the ticker ticking and arthritis at bay. Atrophy will never be my friend. In an analogous way, Thursday Theology serves as a weekly exercise regimen that keeps certain theological

muscles working and a handful of counter-intuitive implications of genuine gospel hanging like frontlets before my adamic, opinio-legis-loving eyes. After all these years, it's still a daily surprise to discover what all I don't have to believe if I seek Truth in the theology of the cross and the foolishness of the gospel.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for the preceding 499 Thursday offerings, and all those yet to come.

Frederick Niedner
Chair, Department of Theology
Valparaiso University