

# FAQ About Recent ELCA Decisions

Colleagues,

Peter Keyel's name has appeared four times in ThTh postings during the calendar year now coming to a close. In some of those instances he's authoring text for the ThTh posting that week. Google his name on Crossings' internal search option if you want to learn more.

His self-presentation in one of those postings goes like this: "Dr Peter Keyel is a layman who works in immunology and was raised in the ELCA. He got more than he bargained for when he asked Ed about a Biblical understanding of homosexuality and was instead given a Lutheran Law/Gospel lens for considering it. Pleased to be free of the Biblicism he'd fallen into, Peter is now trying to apply what he's learned more generally."

Here's one sample. Apart from any suggestion on my part, Peter composed this set of Q&A for his own congregation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He's given me permission to pass it on to the Crossings crowd. Here it is.

At Year's End and New Year's Beginning—Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder.

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## FAQ About Recent ELCA Decisions

### What did the ELCA just do?

The highest legislative body of the ELCA, the Churchwide Assembly, approved a Social Statement on Human Sexuality

describing, among other things, 4 positions on homosexuality and same-gendered relationships that are accepted within the ELCA. In light of these positions, it also changed ELCA ministry policy to allow the ordination of people in same-gendered, publicly-accountable, lifelong, monogamous relationships.

**How did this happen all of a sudden?**

While acceptance of homosexuality has been discussed for the last 20 years, it is only with this recent change that many churches are now aware that this is a topic at all. Although the ELCA has passed resolutions concerning same-gendered relationships in 2001, 2005 and 2007, and encouraged further dialogue and discussion during the drafting and revision of the Social Statement on Human Sexuality, some congregations were not comfortable or able to discuss this issue. While the ELCA is a church committed common mission of spreading the Gospel promise, it is not perfect, and many in the church regret that they were unable to prevent this change from coming as a complete surprise to any.

**Are you sure it wasn't a small, but wealthy, gay lobby that did this?**

Yes. This is an easily testable assertion, since most synods adopt memorial resolutions calling on the Churchwide Assembly to take a given action on resolutions important to the synod. This also gives a more accurate picture of the whole church, since delegates to synod assembly are chosen and sent by each church in the synod. If you look at the results from the 2009 synod assemblies, you can see that the majority of synods adopted memorial resolutions favoring both the Sexuality document and the Ministry Policy Recommendations.

**But I hear about a lot of synods that are redirecting giving and resolving never to call people in same-gendered relationships.**

The actions currently being taken are by the synod councils. These are small groups of people with power trying to make policy for an entire synod. While synod councils should be fostering dialogue between concerned parties, the best place to make any permanent decisions is at the synod assembly, where members of all the churches in the synod will have an equal voice in the proceedings.

## **How are these ministry policy changes consistent with Lutheran theology and the Word of God?**

This is the question that many are now struggling with-are these changes contrary to the Word of God? In order to answer this question, we need to go back to the Lutheran Reformation, and look at what breakthroughs the Reformers made. The biggest breakthrough, as we all know, was in justification-that we are saved from our sins by faith alone in Christ's death and resurrection alone. However, soteriology-how we are saved-is never separate from how we read the Bible. That means another breakthrough the Reformers made was in how to read the Bible.

## **How did Luther and the Reformers read the Bible?**

Put simply, Luther saw a double revelation in Scripture-that it contained both God's Law and God's Gospel, and that these were two very different things. While the Law condemns, it is trust in God's Gospel promise that saves. It is this that truly makes the Gospel the Good News: Good in that faith is sufficient for our salvation, and New in that faith is now the criterion for everything that can be considered Christian-morals, beliefs and behaviors included. This is the heart of the Augsburg Confession and Apology, and laid out in Article IV of that document-that there are exactly two measures for anything claiming to be Christian-that it necessitates Christ and spreads the benefits of Christ such that devout consciences are comforted. The Law is important in that it maintains creation and reveals our sin. Much as a doctor first sees outward symptoms of a deep, inner problem, so too God's Law shows not only our outward failures, but also our inner failures, which themselves are caused by our rebellion against God. However, the Law cannot fix our rebellion against God; it is Christ who reconciles us to God and through that reconciliation gives us new life. This means two big things for reading the Bible. First, we must always ask two questions of Scripture-what does the Law diagnose as sin, and how does the Gospel promise heal that sin? We cannot simply ask "how does God want us to live?" because that question fails to account for both the fact that we will fail in such an endeavor and that Christ is a necessary component

of our lives. Second, Scriptural descriptions of Law are the diagnosis of a particular person/culture/nation and not automatically diagnoses of us. This is why Luther called many of the Old Testament laws *Juden-sachsenspiegel*, meaning they have as much universality as the civil law codes of 16th century Saxony, yet he saw the same God behind them.

**But some passages condemning homosexuality are in the New Testament!**

It is unlikely that the words *arsenokoites* and *malakoi* (used in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10) are correctly translated “homosexual” (for example, Luther translated *arsenokoites* as *Knabenschaender*, which means “child abuser”). The end of Romans 1, though, does appear to directly address homosexuality. However, in order to properly put this in context, we must remember that Paul employed the same method of reading the Bible that Luther and the Reformers did. Romans 1 is an excellent example of the first half of this method. Paul walks the reader through the outward sin, which stems from internal sin, which results from rebellion against God. Here, Paul identifies homosexual intercourse as the outward sin, homosexuality as the inner sin, and idolatry as the fundamental problem. In this diagnosis, Paul is entirely caught up in the first century Jewish *ZEITGEIST*-that homosexuality was completely incompatible with being a Jew, and indeed, the phrase “homosexual Jew” would have been an oxymoron. While Paul’s method is correct, today we understand that homosexuality is not correctly assigned as a result of idolatry. Therefore, in this light, we see that this is another example of “*Juden-sachsenspiegel*,” even though it is in the New Testament, and the same-gendered relationships spoken about today are understood very differently.

**So are these new policies consistent with the Word of God?**

Yes. They do not fail the tests provided by Article IV of the Augsburg Confession and Apology-recognition of same-gender relationships and ordination of people therein does not eliminate the need for Christ, nor does it stifle the message of Christ. If anything, this is one answer to the prayer Christ suggests in Matthew 9:38: “Ask the Lord of the harvest, to send out workers into his harvest field.” While

there is still some confusion on exactly what form “publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous relationships” will take, it is best understood as part of God’s ordaining for creation known as the estate of marriage. The Reformers understood the estate of marriage to be located in the “left-hand” kingdom of the world (as contrasted with the “right-hand” kingdom of the church administering the Gospel and sacraments), and as such, the configurations of existence within this estate change over time. Polygamy and Levirate marriage—though “kosher” in the Bible—are two configurations for marriage that we no longer use. Changing configurations of an estate are most clearly seen in that of government, as we now have a republic where once empire and monarchy reigned. The church’s task is not choosing a specific configuration of government or marriage (remember that when Paul speaks of authority in Romans 13:4, “it is God’s servant for your good,” he is referring to Emperor Nero and the Roman Empire). Instead, its mission is the right-hand task of spreading the life-giving Gospel to the world. Thus, changing one configuration within the left-hand kingdom does not alter or negate the church’s mission. In this particular case, these changes signal a firm commitment to include all people in the mission and life of the church, and will strengthen the church with the addition of the gifts those in same-gendered relationships will bring to the ministry.

### **What about this “cheap grace” I keep hearing about?**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor who led the confessing church against Hitler, and was hanged for being involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler, popularized the term in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. He explains cheap grace as “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.” In contrast, “costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: ‘My

yoke is easy and my burden is light.'" This is another way of viewing Article IV of the Augsburg Confession and Apology- cheap grace does not necessitate Christ, whereas costly grace comes at the cross to sinners who understand that they cannot save themselves. As explained above, these ministry policy recommendations are consistent with Article IV, and as such are not promoting cheap grace. They do not remove the need for Christ's death and resurrection from the life of either the ELCA or the person in a same-gendered relationship. Instead, these ministry policy changes are a reorganization how we live in marriage and how we organize the church, much like the reorganization in our government when desegregation was required and the government resolved to protect and uphold the rights of all people, regardless of race, gender or ethnic background.

**Should my congregation withhold benevolence to the ELCA because of this?**

This decision is one that is ultimately up to the congregation. However, the decision to redirect giving over these matters reflects a lack of Christian unity. Historically, Lutherans have always been very interested in Christian unity-Martin Luther intended to reform the Catholic church, and the Lutheran denomination only grew out of the Catholic church's rejection of Luther and his followers. Similarly, venerable Lutherans may remember how the Missouri Synod rejected its own seminary students and teaching faculty back in the 1970's. The ELCA has resolved to not reject anyone over this decision, no matter how they feel about either the Human Sexuality Statement or the ministry policy changes. These policies have not changed the mission of the ELCA, which is to bring the light of the Gospel to the nations. Indeed, the ELCA still participates in all of the ministries it previously did, and your congregation's money will still go to funding those ministries.

**Is the ELCA about to fall apart?**

No. There are congregations that will leave (and have left) the ELCA over this decision, but they are less than 1% of the church. While some regions of the country are more enthusiastic about these changes than others, the majority of

the ELCA is committed to living together and understanding that we will not always agree on everything. Even within your own congregation, there are people who have mutually exclusive ideas about a wide range of other church matters. The miracle of God's reconciliation of the world to Himself is that we are all reconciled to the same Christ regardless of our differences. When we live in that reconciliation, we can no more reject fellow siblings in Christ than they can reject us.

### **What can I do about all of this?**

There are a lot of ways that you can directly help the ELCA in these troubled times. Most importantly, keep your trust in Christ, remember that Christ is God's promise of reconciliation to the world, and that as Christians we are tasked with carrying this promise into the world. Commit yourself to reconciliation as these decisions are implemented so that your congregation can move forward as one healthy whole, even if it disagrees on some issues. Continued dialogue on this matter is important, but it is also important that dialogue occur between siblings, not enemies. Continue to show your support of the ELCA in both its local and global mission through your time, energy and money.

### **Where can I get more information?**

The ELCA website: [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org)

For more theology, see the Crossings Community's website: [www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org)

For assistance in building a welcoming congregation, see Lutherans Concerned: [www.lcna.org](http://www.lcna.org)

Peter Keyel

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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# Two Different Gospels for The Night before Christmas –“Avatar” and the Manged Messiah

Colleagues,

Two of you readers—one Canadian, one Texan—keep me up-to-date with the New York Times. You sent me this week’s NYT review of “Avatar,” the blockbuster movie released “just in time for Christmas.” I haven’t seen the film, and from the review that follows I’m wondering: Is it such a superb proclamation of an “other gospel” that I’ve just gotta see it, or is the two-word commentary from one of you enough, and I should save my money? “Deus absconditus,” [God (stays) hidden], the Canadian said. Says the NYT reviewer: “[It is] not the Christian Gospel. Instead, ‘Avatar’ is [writer-director James] Cameron’s long apologia for pantheism . . . Hollywood’s religion of choice . . . because millions of Americans respond favorably to [it].”

I don’t have to go to Avatar for evidence that the Gospel of pantheism is widespread in America. It’s alive and (sob!) well in the Schroeder clan and has been known to surface when conversation gets around to “what do you really believe?”

For today’s Christmas posting, I’ll pass on to you the NYT review of Avatar, and then hand on to you some selections from Martin Luther’s Christmas sermons. You’ll divine the difference.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder



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<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/21/opinion/21douthat1.html?emc=eta1>

## **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

### **Heaven and Nature**

**By ROSS DOUTHAT**

**Published: December 20, 2009**

It's fitting that James Cameron's "Avatar" arrived in theaters at Christmastime. Like the holiday season itself, the science fiction epic is a crass embodiment of capitalistic excess wrapped around a deeply felt religious message. It's at once the blockbuster to end all blockbusters, and the Gospel According to James.

But not the Christian Gospel. Instead, "Avatar" is Cameron's long apologia for pantheism – a faith that equates God with Nature, and calls humanity into religious communion with the natural world.

In Cameron's sci-fi universe, this communion is embodied by the blue-skinned, enviably slender Na'Vi, an alien race whose idyllic existence on the planet Pandora is threatened by rapacious human invaders. The Na'Vi are saved by the movie's hero, a turncoat Marine, but they're also saved by their faith in Eywa, the "All Mother," described variously as a network of energy and the sum total of every living thing.

If this narrative arc sounds familiar, that's because pantheism has been Hollywood's religion of choice for a generation now. It's the truth that Kevin Costner discovered when he went dancing with wolves. It's the metaphysic woven through Disney cartoons like "The Lion King" and "Pocahontas." And it's the dogma of George Lucas's Jedi, whose mystical Force "surrounds

us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together.”

Hollywood keeps returning to these themes because millions of Americans respond favorably to them. From Deepak Chopra to Eckhart Tolle, the “religion and inspiration” section in your local bookstore is crowded with titles pushing a pantheistic message. A recent Pew Forum report on how Americans mix and match theology found that many self-professed Christians hold beliefs about the “spiritual energy” of trees and mountains that would fit right in among the indigo-tinted Na’Vi.

As usual, Alexis de Tocqueville saw it coming. The American belief in the essential unity of all mankind, Tocqueville wrote in the 1830s, leads us to collapse distinctions at every level of creation. “Not content with the discovery that there is nothing in the world but a creation and a Creator,” he suggested, democratic man “seeks to expand and simplify his conception by including God and the universe in one great whole.”

Today there are other forces that expand pantheism’s American appeal. We pine for what we’ve left behind, and divinizing the natural world is an obvious way to express unease about our hyper-technological society. The threat of global warming, meanwhile, has lent the cult of Nature qualities that every successful religion needs – a crusading spirit, a rigorous set of “thou shalt nots,” and a piping-hot apocalypse.

At the same time, pantheism opens a path to numinous experience for people uncomfortable with the literal-mindedness of the monotheistic religions – with their miracle-working deities and holy books, their virgin births and resurrected bodies. As the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski noted, attributing divinity to the natural world helps “bring God closer to human experience,” while “depriving him of recognizable personal

traits.” For anyone who pines for transcendence but recoils at the idea of a demanding Almighty who interferes in human affairs, this is an ideal combination.

Indeed, it represents a form of religion that even atheists can support. Richard Dawkins has called pantheism “a sexed-up atheism.” (He means that as a compliment.) Sam Harris concluded his polemic “The End of Faith” by rhapsodizing about the mystical experiences available from immersion in “the roiling mystery of the world.” Citing Albert Einstein’s expression of religious awe at the “beauty and sublimity” of the universe, Dawkins allows, “In this sense I too am religious.”

The question is whether Nature actually deserves a religious response. Traditional theism has to wrestle with the problem of evil: if God is good, why does he allow suffering and death? But Nature is suffering and death. Its harmonies require violence. Its “circle of life” is really a cycle of mortality. And the human societies that hew closest to the natural order aren’t the shining Edens of James Cameron’s fond imaginings. They’re places where existence tends to be nasty, brutish and short.

Religion exists, in part, precisely because humans aren’t at home amid these cruel rhythms. We stand half inside the natural world and half outside it. We’re beasts with self-consciousness, predators with ethics, mortal creatures who yearn for immortality.

This is an agonized position, and if there’s no escape upward – or no God to take on flesh and come among us, as the Christmas story has it – a deeply tragic one.

Pantheism offers a different sort of solution: a downward exit, an abandonment of our tragic self-consciousness, a re-merger with the natural world our ancestors half-escaped millennia ago.

But except as dust and ashes, Nature cannot take us back.

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## Excerpts from Christmas Sermons by Martin Luther

1. Deus Revelatus (God revealed). 1522 "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:7

Behold, how simply these things happen on earth, and yet they are so highly esteemed in heaven. On earth it happens thus: there is a poor young wife, Mary, at Nazareth, thought nothing of and regarded as one of the lowliest women in the town. No one is aware of the great wonder that she bears. And she herself keeps silent, does not pride herself, and thinks she is the lowliest woman in the town. She goes up with Joseph, her mate. They have probably neither man-servant nor maid-servant, but he is master and servant, and she is mistress and maid. Perhaps they left their homestead to look after itself, or they may have given it into a neighbor's care.

As they are thus drawing nigh to Bethlehem, the Evangelist presents them to us as the most wretched and disdained of all the pilgrims, being forced to give way to everyone, till at last they are turned out into a stable, and made to share shelter, table, and bedchamber with the beasts, while many a wicked man sits in the inn above and is treated like a lord. Not a soul notices and knows what God is doing in that stable. He leaves empty the manors and stately chambers, and leaves the people to their eating and drinking, and their good cheer. But this comfort and great treasure remains hidden from them.

O, what a thick, black darkness was over Bethlehem then, that she failed to apprehend so great a light! How truly God shows that He has no regard for the world and its ways, and again, how the world shows that it has no regard for God, for what He is, and has, and does.

2. Joyful Exchange (aka Sweet Swap). 1522 "The Word was made flesh." John 1:14

Christ has a holy birth, immaculate and pure. Man's birth is unclean, sinful, and accursed, and man can only be helped through the holy birth of Christ. Yet Christ's birth cannot be shared out to us, nor would it help; but it is offered spiritually unto every man wherever the Word is preached. He who firmly believes and receives it will not suffer harm because of his own sinful birth.

That is the way we are cleansed of our wretched Adam's birth, and that is why it was Christ's will and pleasure to be born as man, so that in Him we might be born again. "Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we should be reborn unto a new creation." Behold, in this manner Christ takes our birth away from us and sinks it in His own birth and gives us His birth, that we may be made new and clean, as if it were our own birth. Therefore shall every Christian man rejoice in this birth of Christ, and glory in it, as if he too were born of Mary. He who does not believe that, or doubts it, is no Christian.

O, this is the great joy of which the angel speaks. This is God's comfort and His surpassing goodness, that man (if he believeth) may glory in such a treasure, that Mary be his very Mother, Christ his Brother, and God his Father. For all these things have truly happened that we might believe in them.

See, then, that thou make this birth thine own and dost exchange with Him, so that thou mayest be rid of thy birth, and mayest take over His, which comes to pass when thou believest. Thus dost thou surely sit in the Virgin Mary's lap, and art her darling child. But thou must learn to have such faith and to exercise it throughout thine earthly life, for it always need strengthening.

### 3. Fear Not! 1531 "Fear not!" Luke 2:10

Thereby is shown that this King is born unto those who live in fear and trembling, and such alone belong to His Kingdom. Unto them shall be preached, as the angels preached unto the poor, affrighted shepherds: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." And, of a truth, such joy is offered to all men, but only those can receive it who are affrighted in their consciences, and troubled in their hearts. These are they who belong to me and to my preaching, and unto them shall I bring good tidings. Is it not a wonderful thing that this joy is nearest to those whose conscience is the most restless?

The world is happy and of good cheer when it has loaves and fishes, means and money, power and glory. But a sad and troubled heart desires nothing but peace and comfort, that it may know whether God is graciously inclined towards it. And this joy, wherein a troubled heart finds peace and rest, is so great that all the world's happiness is nothing in comparison. Therefore should such good tidings be preached to wretched consciences as the angel preaches here: Harken unto me, you of a sad and troubled heart, I bring you good tidings. For He hath not come down to earth and been made Man, that He might cast you into hell, much less was He for that end crucified and given over unto death for you. But He has come, that with great joy he might rejoice in Him. And if thou wouldst truly

define Christ and properly describe who and what He is, mark well the angel's word, how he defined and describes Him, saying that He is and is called: "Great Joy." O, blessed is the man who can well understand the meaning of this word, and hold it truly in his heart; for therein dwelleth strength.

4. For You. 1544 "Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10-11.

The little word "you" should make us joyful. For unto whom does He speak? Unto wood or stones? Nay, verily, He speaks unto men; and not unto one or two, but unto all the people. How then shall we understand these words? Shall we yet doubt the grace of God and say: "St. Peter and St. Paul may well rejoice that their Savior is come, but I may not, I am a wretched sinner; the dear and precious treasure is not for me!"? My friend, if thou wilt say: He is not mine, then shall I say: Whose is He then? Has He come to save geese and ducks and cows? Thou must look here who He is. If He had come to save another creature, yea, of a truth, He had assumed the likeness of that creature. But now He hath been made the Son of Man.

And who art thou, and who am I? Are we not likewise sons of men? Yea verily, we are! Who, then, but men should receive this child? The angels do not need Him. The devils do not want Him. But we need Him, and for our sake was He made Man. Thus it behooves us to receive Him joyfully, as here the angels say: "Unto you is born a Savior." Is it not a great and marvelous thing that an angel should come from heaven with such good news? and that afterwards so many thousands of angels are filled with overflowing joy, which makes them desire that we should also be glad, and

should receive such grace with thankful hearts? And therefore we should write this little word (with flaming letters) in our hearts: “For You!” and should joyfully welcome the birth of this Savior.

–These citations come from “Day By Day We Magnify Thee: Daily Readings for the Church Year. Selected from the Writings of Martin Luther,” tr. by Margarete Steiner, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1982.

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## **West Point Cadets, Obama’s Speeches and Jeremiah 33.**

Colleagues,

I asked for help last week to finish the six-step crossing task between the Jeremiah text we heard on the first Sunday in Advent (as laid before us in Steve Kuhl’s study of that text) and President Obama’s speech before the cadets at West Point Military Academy. Only two responses came back to me, one from Peter Keyel and one from Steve himself. Peter connected the three Good News steps to the situation. Steve took it from the top and did the whole six-rung stepladder. Here are both of them.

Peace and Joy!

Ed

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Hi Ed,



I didn't give you a submission earlier, because I really wasn't sure how to do it. After reading the conversation between you and David (ThTh 600), something clicked, and I decided to give it a try. Here it is:

**Step 4: Promissio:** *I Will Cause a Righteous Branch to Spring up for David* The righteous branch that has sprung up for David is also the righteous branch that has sprung up for us-Jesus Christ. His righteousness becomes ours on the cross, and even America's sins are not too great to separate any of us from that new righteousness: "I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me" (Jer. 33:8). Still today, especially today, when no battle plan or troop surge can bring us safety, Christ reaches out and is the only source both of salvation and safety.

**Step 5: Confessio:** *Embracing the Promise of God: "The Lord is our righteousness"* (v. 16)

When one embraces the Promise of God, there is no room left for any other. No longer is our trust placed in America, Obama or the Pentagon. Although these and their forms of righteousness will pass away, God's Word does not, and holds us. Shielded by that Promise, the cadets do not need to fear the death that awaits in Afghanistan because they know their vindication is through faith in Christ, not in their deeds there. Instead, they are supported and buoyed by that righteousness given to them from Christ in Word and Sacrament. God will be with them in Afghanistan and when they come home.

**Step 6: Missio:** *Saved and Living in Safety* (v. 15)

The cadets facing deployment to Afghanistan will be threatened by human enemies. However, bereft of the rod of God's wrath, these enemies can be seen for what they truly are: our lost brothers and sisters. Even as the cadets execute their assigned

*left-hand task, the promise-trusters among them bear a second, right-hand task: spreading the Promise that all are loved and forgiven by God. That will seem impossible at times, especially when serving as a cog in the gears of retribution. And yet, trusting in Christ, they can find opportunities to spread both the Good News and the promised healing to a broken people. Even our secular authorities acknowledge that military might cannot win the day-that it will take building trust and safety with all of the Afghan people. Buoyed by Christ's Promise, our soldiers can risk their lives not to kill our enemies, but to love them.*

Peter Keyel  
Pittsburgh, PA

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West Point Cadets, Obama's Speeches (West Point and Nobel) and Jeremiah 33.

### A Preliminary Crossing

For Thursday Theology #599, Ed began to "cross" the West Point cadets as they listened to President Obama explain why he was sending 30,000 troops to Afghanistan (the tracking) with my "grounding" of Jeremiah 33:14-16. He prefaced that by reminding us that "crossing" isn't simply about text studies (a law/promise exegetical unpacking of the already "crossed" lives of our biblical forebears) but learning from these text studies (as grounding) how to unpack and repack our lives with that same law/promise wisdom. The textual "grounding" is meant to be used like steel wool being rubbed onto glass tubing (the particular historic lives that can be "tracked" for their particular specs) with the hope that sparks, connections, "crossings" are made. Crossing, therefore, is not an abstract application of general

principles. Rather, it asks: Learning how God has dealt with his people in the past (the biblical grounding), does that give us clues (crossings) as to how God is dealing with us in this particular situation today (tracking)? Therefore, crossing is not third-person gossip, it is second-person address that takes seriously the actual first-person responses of the people being crossed. Keep my grounding of the text close at hand as I seek to learn clues from it for crossing Jeremiah's law/promise wisdom to the West Point cadets.

### **Diagnosis: Insufficient Righteousness**

**Initial Diagnosis:** Crossing these cadets with Jeremiah 33 presents a dilemma of sorts. I don't know these cadets. I have no way of asking them what they may be thinking about. Maybe they were in church on Sunday and heard the text of Jeremiah read. Maybe they didn't. But I do have the image of their stoic faces in mind—and those faces say something. What they say, I think, can easily add up to what Ed (following my grounding) points out in the initial diagnosis part of the crossing. There is obviously a human enemy. There is obviously physical danger. But worse, there is also obviously a debate at home about whether this assignment is right! Jeremiads are plentiful enough. Why else would the President take all this time to make his case to these cadets, who are simply to follow orders anyway? Why else if there is not a question of the righteousness of it all?

**Advanced Diagnosis:** Neither does it take any great stretch of the imagination to think what might be going on underneath the countenances of those stoic faces. For example, as part of the tracking, Chris Matthews of MSNBC "Hardball" was chastised for suggesting that those stoic, expressionless faces signaled a sense of "if not resentment, then skepticism" about what the President was placing on them, suggesting Obama was giving this

speech “in enemy territory.” It was quickly pointed out to Matthews that the cadets are instructed to show no emotion for any speech-and Matthews apologized. Indeed, it would seem that cadets are simply to block out, lock up, any thoughts, yea or nay, of the righteousness of this assignment. They will simply proceed on orders as though righteous. Evidently, not only cadets, but the public in general has become quite adept at employing stoic resolve to the inevitable orders that are being set before them. How else could the cadets function? How else could, we, the public, function?

**Final Diagnosis:** I have no clue if the cadets at West Point or the public in general can entertain the possibility that the righteous wrath of God might be operative behind either the human enemy we face or the words the Jeremiads express. But, then, that hardly matters. For the truth of such things doesn't depend on either the cadets or the public believing it. Indeed, it is often part of the effectiveness of wrath, human as well as divine, that it leaves just enough room for skepticism about its existence and just enough appearance of our own security and self-righteousness that it can't be seen. Might that not explain much of the rhetoric that fills the air today? Surprise is not only the cherished strategy of the human enemy, including terrorists; it is also often the strategy that accompanies God's wrath. And yet, truth be told, God does reveal his wrath to the nations in outward tangible ways: such as frustrated military campaigns, fiscal crises, determined enemies like Al Qaeda, body bags of soldiers, and PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder) that destroys lives and breaks up families. Jeremiah thinks so (remember the ominous words of Jer. 33:5) and so does St. Paul (Rom. 2:1). Not being able to see the wrath may be equally a function both of stoic resolve, operating on the assumption of righteousness, and of the lack of revelatory signals in history from God.

## **The Gospel's Offer of a New Prognosis: Sufficient Righteousness**

**Initial Prognosis:** While evidence abounds for Jeremiah's kind of diagnosis in the American war situation, where is the evidence for Jeremiah's kind of prognosis in our world, the promise as expressed in Step 4 of the grounding? Where is Advent happening: the offer of the promised Righteous Branch who is able (worthy) to deliver us from the wrath of God? Where is the promise of Jesus Christ crucified for our transgressions and raised for our justification or righteousness proclaimed? If I may be so bold, I would say, "here!" Here in the work of the Crossings Community. Here the promise is being sent forth over the World Wide Web for all to see. Here is a community dispersed throughout the world speaking that promise out loud. But there may also be other signs. Take, for example, not Obama's West Point speech but his Nobel Peace Prize speech. To the world audience (and hopefully the cadets were listening) Obama raised to public view the ghost of Reinhold Niebuhr, even though the name of Niebuhr was never mentioned.

Niebuhr, recall, is that Jeremiah-like prophet of repentance and grace who in the first half of the 20th Century didn't mince his words about the realism of human sin and the folly of the liberal (self-righteous) ideology of human progress. But neither did he shy away from asserting the power of gospel promise to transform "children of darkness into children of light." Moreover, look where the explicit reference to Niebuhr, as the unspoken source of the speech's realism, comes from: from news journalists, who think they discern something of Niebuhr's paradoxical message of sin and grace inching its way into the public square by none other than the President himself, described by one journalist as a Christian who is not a "Christianist." That is, a Christian who is not a sectarian partisan who uses faith as a wedge, but a "serious Christian" who is concerned about trumpeting the "audacity of hope" in the

midst of “tragedy,” wondering if a more realistic phrase to capture Obama’s message wouldn’t be the “tragedy of hope.” [I’m referring to a Niebuhrian analysis of Obama by Andrew Sullivan—“I’m a conservative!”— on THE ATLANTIC website at this address: [http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the\\_daily\\_dish/2009/12/the-tragedy-of-hope.html](http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the_daily_dish/2009/12/the-tragedy-of-hope.html)

if>.] Could this be the seeds of Obama’s Christian tutelage under Jeremiah Wright bearing fruit? True, Crossings people may find more in Niebuhr than what journalists have found. Indeed, Crossings people may find ways to improve on Niebuhr’s own articulation of the audacity of the promise. But yet, the emergence of Niebuhr’s ghost, I’m suggesting, is no small matter in the prognosis at this time.

**Advanced Prognosis:** Is the ghost of Niebuhr (and the Jeremiah kind of promise it suggests) also accompanied by faith? Answering “yes” to that question is central to any Christian prognosis. For the kind of realism that the promise intends is not real at all until it is real FOR YOU, real in the heart, real as faith. The realism of faith overrules the realism of stoic resignation because realism of the promise overrules wrath with forgiveness. In Jeremiah’s words, the realism of the promise is that it creates “thanksgiving,” stoic countenances broken by the promise with the cracking of a smile. The article I referred to above doesn’t talk about thanksgiving, but it does talk about hope-which could be a kind of thanksgiving, an anticipated thanksgiving. What is characteristic of hope is that it is audaciously realistic. That realism, it seems to me, is the one-two punch of repentance-and-faith: transferring our hope away from human potentiality (repentance) and into the promise of God in Christ (faith). I’m not sure if there is a lot of evidence of that happening yet, either among the cadets or out there in the public discourse. What I remember from Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize speech is that he is still appealing to a deep

belief in human progress: albeit, thanks to Niebuhr, a more sober, more realistic assessment of that belief. Could that be the beginning of repentance born of faith? That doubt about human potentiality-about our potentiality!

**Final Prognosis:** Of course, after all is said and done, it is obvious that the human enemies, Al Qaeda and the Taliban, have not been deterred one iota by all this talk of promise and faith in Christ-at least, not yet. Indeed, truth be told, the resolve of these enemies against us may actually be encouraged by all this sober talk of realism, repentance and faith. And yes, all this talk of repentance does, then, also play right into the hands of those in our midst who would in the name of patriotism and national pride, wittingly or unwittingly, become enemies themselves of the promise. And even more, those cadets may very well still need to go off to war. Let none of this sober realism be denied! After all, this is the risk of faith borne as the cross in daily life. But then, we must also remember this. None of this talk of promise, repentance and faith was ever undertaken simply that we might defeat these human enemies. Rather, it was undertaken to disarm these enemies of that most powerful and secret of all weapons that the world will ever face-a weapon our enemy possesses, if it possesses it, without knowledge or righteousness: the wrath of God against us. Who knows? Maybe by repentance and faith that weapon of God's wrath will backfire in their hands to the amazement of us all. And if it doesn't, and for some divine reason God sees fit to remove us as power from the world political scene, we can know this: we can dwell in the land before God in the safety of his steadfast love.

Steve Kuhl

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# Further Conversation on “30,000 More Charioteers into the Red Sea?”

Colleagues,

Last week's ThTh post (599) concluded by asking for help from the listserve readership to finish out the six-step CROSSING phase of linking President Obama's "30,000 more" speech and Steve's Kuhl's Biblical GROUNDING in the Gospel for Advent I. ThTh 599 had offered only the first three steps, the "bad news" crossovers between that Biblical text and the American scene. "Finish out" meant spelling out the last three steps, the "good news" steps, to bring the Gospel's own new prognosis as articulated in the Biblical text to the American scene. So I asked for some audience participation.

Only three responses have come in so far. One just citing a "secular prophet," with no comment. Here it is.

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ROBERT BOROSAGE

## Imperial Blues

President Obama made the best possible case for dispatching more troops to Afghanistan last night. But his speech left me with a haunting foreboding. Surely this is the way that great imperial powers decline. Their soldiers police the ends of the earth. There is always another enemy, always a threat – sometimes imagined, often real – that must be faced. And meanwhile, the



productive economy declines, the rich live increasingly off investments abroad, the poor depend on public sustenance, the middle declines.

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Another arrived –from Steve Kuhl himself–promising something by next week Thursday–after he gets all those final exams graded from his students at Cardinal Strich University in Milwaukee.

And one from a pastor in Michigan “spelled it out.”

Granted, I had to tease it out of David Boedecker after he first asked for me to “just do it” myself. David is pastor of Christ Lutheran congregation in Marshall, Michigan. He’s been pastoring for “25-plus” years, he tells me. Our email exchange amounted to a trilogy. I reprint all of it below FYI.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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Dear Ed.

It’s not that I disagree with you, but I don’t know how to meld your “jeremiad” with that good old Lutheran question, “What does this mean?”

Ought one not pray (not proclaim) but pray for God to bless America with compassion, kindness, wisdom and dare we hope, righteousness? That’s what I pray for. I know America, its people and leaders have been unwise, unkind and unrighteous. I know that I also am a sinner in need of redemption. I know that God’s Law damns my own feeble attempts at self-justification so I come to Him empty-handed–worse, with my hands full of my failures and asking Him to nail them up on the cross and cleanse my heart and my hands with the blood of Jesus.

But where from there? I am not asking for simplistic answers. I am asking "Jeremiah" for a direction. Repentance, yes—every day with every splash of water. I also saw the faces of those cadets. I have nephews who have been in Iraq and Afganistan and one headed back there. I grieve over lives wasted and believe we must have a metanoia.

But (and I mean this sincerely, not arrogantly) suppose you are the president (take your pick, Barack or Bush). Do you simply write off the Middle East to duke it out? Do we concern ourselves with those who hijack planes and crash them into buildings? Do we concern ourselves with those who strap bombs to women and children and set them off in crowded streets? Are we our brothers' keepers when oceans separate us? Is America never a candidate as hand of God's justice? Do we do nothing right or righteous or even, dare I say, a bit more godly than the Taliban?

I do call my people to repentance (even as I hear that call myself) and pray that like ripples in a pond, what is preached in my pulpit finds resonance with other pulpits, other peoples, and we experience both the judgment of God and grace of God.

Your words have cut into me and my request is sincere. Thursday theology [has] been one of my teachers over the past years and I believe I am not too old or set in my ways to learn something new.

So, without trying to dictate what/how you write in Thursday theology and certainly not calling you out on what you've written, I am asking you to consider my questions for another installment of Thursday Theology. I am truly struggling to move from insight to action, to heed the Word, but I need a clearer trumpet.

Respectfully,

Rev. David Boedecker

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David,

You ask for “another installment of Thursday Theology.”

That’s what I thought I was asking fellow-Crossers to help me do when I asked them (you included) to take the GOOD NEWS in Steve Kuhl’s last three steps—the Gospel’s New Prognosis for the sick-unto-death client (6th century B.C. Judah and 21st century USA) and formulate God’s Good Word for our nation. Instead of just “the nation” as a mass of folks, what is God’s good word for us to speak to those cadets whose grim and sombre faces we saw at West Point. According to the Jeremiah text, what’s God’s good word for them—for us all.

Next week’s ThTh 600 intends to report out whatever “youse guys and gals” send me as Good News for patients with such a deadly diagnosis, the very stuff you are calling for. So send something yourself. What does the Jeremiah text (with Steve Kuhl’s masterful steps 4,5,6) give you to give to your people in Marshall MI as God’s Good News for such a time as this? What did you already proclaim to them last Sunday when Jeremiah was the OT text and Jesus himself in Luke was the apocalyptic preacher to people of his time—and our own as well?

“Another installment of ThTh,” you say. OK, help me put one together.

Cheers!

Ed

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Dear Ed,

Is it any different now?

Yes, it is. The same place, same mess; same victims and victimizers. What is different? A sovereign nation, America, over-impressed with itself and its righteousness and often stuporous in its power and ability to enforce its will, often frustrated that other nations “don’t play by the rules” of warfare as though warfare had any rules.

The Biblical metaphor is not OT, but NT, wars, rumours of wars, chaos on earth and in the heavens. Are we not, unlike Jeremiah et al, living in the endtimes? If so, are wars no longer instruments of specific judgment so much as they are symptoms of a world not getting better, but worse?

The God-sized problem is humankind—American, Iraqi, etc.—our individual and consequent rejection of the ways and will of the Prince of Peace.

Why? Because His peace, like His kingdom, is not of this world. It cannot be. It can only summon us of this world into that kingdom entered only by grace through faith. We don’t get there by being right, only repentant.

Those faces—include cadets in gray, Angela Peacock, Ben Boedeker, US Army—are the faces not of charioteers, but of those sent by the powers of this world to subdue and contain those whom the powers perceive as enemies.

Those powers may be right; they may be wrong; they may be blinded to a better way.

I would not begin to equate Jeremiah the prophet with Jeremiah the Wright. No, not racism, not politics, but a reality in which the kingdom of God (i.e., the nation of God’s people) is not limited to ethnicity (of any kind) but to those whom God has

called and chosen. God's people exist in America—they express themselves by vote, by persuasion, by dialog, by prayer—Barack may be among them, but he is not a prophet, nor is he the “agent” of God's redemption or of judgment. He is simply caught up in the chaos of a world running out of gas.

Do we send “more charioteers” into the sea? That is for the commander in chief both to decide and to account for.

As for the charioteers—if in conscience they choose not to go, we honor their conscience, support their right to choose. Luther had the same problem regarding whether soldiers can be saved. I don't think he got it any neater or tidier than we can.

Because the world is not tidy. It is messy and bloody with actions and attitudes co-mingled with pure, not so pure and purely impure motives.

Is God calling America to repentance? When has God not done so? Vietnam? Korea? WW2, WW1, Civil War, 1812, Revolution, French/Indian—is not all war God's judgment on humankind's unwillingness to respond to the grace of God that teaches, urges us to walk with justice before our God?

Conclusion: No one is righteous, no, not even one. Not me! Not you! Not Barack! Not any of the Crossings Community. Every human-born catastrophe is evidence that we cannot save, fix or redeem ourselves.

There is only grace: grace for preachers like me who do their best each week to turn hearts toward God, grace for presidents who amid myriad clamoring voices seek to be their brother's brother.

Grace, alone, in a hopelessly messy world, where grace is the only hope we have; where we lay hold of the branch of Jesse and

hang on for a rough ride, until by grace we reach the shore where chaos is no more (Revelation, when the sea and its tumult is quelled).

That branch is cross-shaped—where Jesus crossed our chaos.

Till then: we hope, we pray, we vote; we offer our voice to the public discussion and hearing the call to repent, we pass it along in the confidence that in repentance, God's wrath is stilled and we turn to behold a Father's face.

I wish I had more time this week to wax more exegetical—but hearts in Marshall are breaking and I've been called to help bind them up.

Advent blessings and Christmass

Peace to you.

You may publish any/all/none of the above.

In any of those options, I thank you for troubling me.

David

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P..S. from EHS.

Here's a thought. For next month's Crossings conference here in St. Louis they've got me listed for a session labelled "Reading Real Life through the Six Step Lens." Why not make this very topic the "real life" item to work on? We could continue this conversation face-to-face then and there. So if you don't have the energy or the time to send in something now, come to the conference and join the confab in a seminar room. We could make the two responses above—along with Steve Kuhl's promised piece next week—the grist for the mill to get us started. The more I think about this the better it sounds.

The major reason for you to come to the January conference is to engage the major league keynoters: Burrows, Kaariainen and Burce.

When was the last time you ever heard a Roman Catholic theologian (Burrows) define the Christian mission task this way? “To retrieve the centrality of the gospel as promise revolving around the forgiveness of sin and mission as the church’s task in making known God’s promise to save the world.” (President’s Address to The American Society of Missiology, June 2009).

Or a Finnish “mish-kid” (Kaariainen) tell about engaging the Jesuits at Fordham University with his doctoral dissertation on Bertram’s axiom: “promissio is the secret of missio”?

Or Crossings’ own mish-kid (Burse) link his earlier mission ministry in Papua New Guinea to the mission today of his suburban Cleveland congregation?

Cathy Lessmann (Crossings office manager) tells me that two are coming from Singapore for the feast, and now a bishop from an African Initiated Church (check Wikipedia for the term) in Kenya has signed up. Even as only a foretaste of the feast to come, it promises to be a feast. Cathy says that places at the table are still available. Verbum sapiente satis.

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## **30,000 More Charioteers into the Red Sea? “Finish the Job.”**

# Whose Job? On Whom?

Colleagues,

We need Biblical metaphors to talk about the US wars in the Middle East. Today's Baghdad is only 50 miles away from Biblical Babylon, one on the Tigris, the other on the Euphrates, with only a skinny strip of land between the rivers, hence Meso(between)-potamia(the rivers). Needed are not just Biblical metaphors for the stage-setting, but for who—who all—is on stage. And for just how big, how deep, the problem is on that stage.

The OT reading for last Sunday, the First Sunday in Advent, was from Jeremiah. It was about the chosen people entangled in Babylon. How big was their problem? It's a God-sized problem, said Jeremiah. That's not simply a metaphor for the immensity of the problem, but for who's there "making problems." It's not Babylon, claimed Jeremiah, but God who is the Promised People's problem. How big the solution needed? Same answer.

Is it any different now—as you move east of Baghdad/Babylon to Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and zero in on the US entanglements there? If you're using Biblical spectacles, the answer is clear. But you got no clue of that in President Obama's speech to our nation Tuesday evening. It's only al-Qaida and the Taliban—and the wobbly government in Afghanistan, and the safe havens and nuclear bombs in Pakistan, and Bin Laden and, and, and.

Perhaps the most revealing part of the Tuesday evening telecast was not what Obama told the nation, since we knew that already, but those faces as the cameras swept the audience. Obama most likely did not see those thousands of faces so close-up. But we did. Row on row of cookie-cutter clad cadets. And then those



faces! The gray was not only in their uniforms, but in their faces—also cookie-cutter identically stark, sober, sombre. Never once did we see a smile—either in the sweep across that oceanic auditorium, nor when the camera zoomed in on a single face staring at the speaker. What were they thinking? It surely was not “Hooray, I’m likely to be chosen to liberate Afghanistan!” More plausible is the question-caption for this ThTh posting: “30,000 More Charioteers into the Red Sea? And I’m likely to be one of them.”

I wonder whether any of them thought about the “God-sized” element in their possible Red Sea futures. Surely behind some of those thousands of faces there must have been a remnant who put God into the picture, though the president did not. Not God as someone to believe in, but God as an opponent in this war to be reckoned with. In prior ThTh offerings you’ve heard of Luther’s translation of the original Red Sea catastrophe. “God knocked the wheels off the Egyptian chariots.” When the waters rushed back—talk about “surge!”—God engulfed that empire’s army back into the sea.

Long-time readers of these ThTh missives may remember frequent references—since Nine-Eleven—to Luther’s treatise on War Against the Turks (=Muslims), written in 1529 as the people on the eastern edges of Christian Europe were being chewed up by Suleiman the Magnificent. “Two enemies confront us in this war,” he said, “Suleiman’s army and God.” For the moment, Suleiman, though a total villain, is the “rod of God’s anger, the staff of God’s fury.” (Isaiah 10:5) So he and God are in cahoots. We might “kill or capture” (Obama’s frequently used verbs in the address) Turks, but we’ll not succeed in killing or capturing God. It’s patently the other way round. “I kill, and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.” To ignore such a prominent opponent is to be blind indeed—and doomed to defeat.

So when we hear "Finish the job," we have to ask: Whose job? On Whom?

God always has a "job" going on with every nation. Read Psalm 2. Ancient Jeremiah tried to get his own people to face up to the job that God was doing on them. No success. He got dissed—and almost killed—and God did indeed finish the job on King Hezekiah and the people. His agent Babylon swallowed them up.

Does anyone talk about the job God is doing on America these days, with ourselves—what irony—as helpers in "finishing the job"? Any preachers anywhere? Surely not in the mainline denominations. Though madman Jeremiah [his "Christian" name!] Wright, UCC mainliner (well sortuv), sought to do so not long ago and you know what happened to him. The worst of which was that Obama disowned this Jeremiah that God had sent to him in the most explicit way imaginable as his own personal pastor. And with that dissing, Americans didn't listen to him either. Ditto for the first Jeremiah and King Hezekiah. Don't like the message? Kill the messenger. "You're mad. Get out of here!"

Despite the daily catastrophes here at home (in Biblical metaphors "I, the Lord, sent you these") like the Titanic it is still Full Steam Ahead. Not even Stop. Let alone Turn Around.

30,000 more charioteers to Afghanistan to finish the job. Also God's job on us? Another Biblical metaphor: Goliaths wind up decapitated. By virtue of their own pride and folly. In Biblical tragedies the God-conflictors self-destruct, often directly assisting in their own demise.

This past Tuesday's edition of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch had two headline articles on the front page. One was about the president's upcoming speech picturing two US soldiers dressed as though they were on the moon in an Afghanistan landscape that looked like the moon's surface. They were looking up into the

sky at aircraft overhead, so you could hardly see their faces—a metaphor for the “faceless” who get sent to Afghanistan, and Iraq, and, and, and . . . .

The other front page story was about “Angela Peacock, an Iraq war veteran, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.” We see her full face as she and her “psychiatric service dog, named G.I. Joe” push a shopping cart in a local supermarket. It’s a full-face photo, but the face is almost empty, as though the Edvard-Munch-horror was still inside and nothing showing. Nothing of anything. Honorably retired Army sergeant Peacock came home from Iraq “unwounded,” but the war is still with her, in her. Still destroying her. Sample: “Peacock describes a panic attack she had the night before. She buried her head in G.I. Joe’s shiny black coat. She rubbed him and thought hard about how he wasn’t panicking, so everything must be OK. ‘And in 10 minutes, I was OK,’ she says. ‘He forces me to think about something besides myself.’” A nation that destroys its own children is mocking God when it says: God Bless America.

To bring this jeremiad to closure, let’s move over to Steve Kuhl’s superb text study offered for last Sunday’s OT reading from Jeremiah 33. In the early days of Crossings workshops linking our faith to our daily work we called such a text study the GROUNDING for our time together. Then we went about TRACKING the daily work of the participants—What do you do all day and what does that do to you? In both phases we’d scribble out our findings on newsprint sheets and then hang them on the walls around the room. Final phase was CROSSING, where we’d take the newsprint sheet from one of the participants, the personal TRACKING of her/his daily work and tape it up right alongside the GROUNDING sheet we’d created from our Biblical study. Then in Q&A conversastion we’d connect the two, CROSSING back and forth the stuff that was on the two newsprint pages.

So for a windup this week let's take Steve's text study as our GROUNDING, then Obama's Tuesday speech as our TRACKING and see what we can come up with in CROSSING the two into each other. [For the full text of Steve's item GO to <https://crossings.org/theology/2010/theolo758old.shtml>]

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## **First Sunday in Advent**

**OT reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16**

### **DIAGNOSIS: Insufficient Righteousness**

#### Step 1: Initial Diagnosis: Dangerous Days

The situation of Judah is dire. The glory of the nation and the security in which it once resided is slipping away. It is only a matter of time until the nation is overtaken by the Babylonians and carried away into exile. Specifically, Nebuchadnezzar's army is advancing on Jerusalem (Jer. 33:5) and the prophet Jeremiah has been preaching that this is God's judgment upon Judah and its king, Zedekiah (whose name in Hebrew means "the righteous") for their cleverly concealed wickedness (33:5). In effect, Jeremiah the prophet is Zedekiah's "Jeremiah Wright" (recall the 2008 presidential elections), speaking words of "God's wrath" (God damning the nation) against the king and the nation for its "wickedness" (33:5).

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So far Steve's prose. Now CROSSING that much of Jeremiah's diagnosis to USA Today.

Steve already does that with his Jeremiah-then and Jeremiah Wright-now crossover. Here's some more.

Of course, we're righteous. That's America's centuries-long mantra. We sang it at our Thanksgiving liturgy last week: "And

crown thy good . . . from sea to shining sea.” Our president preached to us on that theme—endangered America, yes, but righteous America, no question. But are we righteous enough? That is THE question. Righteous enough for survival? is a question nobody is asking. That itself is a signal of deficient right-ness. Not seeing our own self aright. Not seeing aright the signs of the times. Not hearing the voice behind the signals: “I sent you this affliction.” Such deficient rightness is dangerous indeed. When God is the decider of rightness, deficiency is more than dangerous. It is deadly. [But I’m jumping ahead to Step 3.] Not right! Back to Steve.

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Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : Shutting up the Word of God: “The Prophet Jeremiah was confined [by Zedekiah] in the court of the guard” (32:2-3)

What do Zedekiah and the nation do in the face of such danger? They trust in their own righteousness and attempt to silence the word of judgment by locking Jeremiah in the palace prison (33:1). “How dare Jeremiah speak against God’s favorite, Judah, and its righteous king, Zedekiah?” After all, isn’t Zedekiah a “righteous branch” of the tree of David, a leader with the right pedigree, the right royal genes? At least, that is the skewed logic of all those who operate with a presumption of righteousness before the Lord.

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Crossing to USA Today

Which God do we trust—most of the time?

Where are the temples? Wall Street and the Pentagon. The edifices of our accumulated righteousness. Granted the former was near catastrophe last year, but we’re into “recovery.”

That's a curiously applied medical term and we've never asked if we got to the bottom, the D-2 and the D-3 of the diagnosis. And not having probed there—call it denial—we're content with bandaids for surface symptoms. But the heart of the matter, and the roots underlying that, aren't touched, and they haven't gone away. Presumption. And Wall Street and the Pentagon are Siamese twins. and we like it, we trust them. Those are the gods in whom we trust. Money (we have enough to do it 30-billion for one year) and the military (30K will do it. That's amounts to one million for one soldier for one year!) were the deities we were asked to trust in the president's Tuesday evening homily. "Yes, it'll be tough. But we can do it."

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### Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : I Have Hidden My Face (33:5)

But Jeremiah is only the messenger. He is not himself the rod of God's wrath "executing justice and righteousness" against Zedekiah and the nation. Babylon is (32:3)! And Zedekiah and the nation are helpless before Babylon. Why? Not because Babylon is so powerful militarily (recall how little David felled Goliath), or because Babylon is righteous before God. Indeed, Babylon is as presumptuous before God as Judah and Zechariah—and it too will fall one day. No, the reason why Babylon at this time is invincible is because the Lord says, "I am going to give this city into the hand of the King of Babylon" (32:3). Babylon is simply a tool in the hand of the Lord "to exercise justice and righteousness" in accord with God's wrath. Just because God's face is hidden within the armies of Babylon (33:5), don't think God's judgment, "the execution of justice and righteousness" upon wickedness, isn't there and real. Zedekiah and Judah do not have sufficient righteousness to stand up to this enemy, "the Lord who made the earth" (33:1). Indeed, no one does.

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Crossing to USA Today

You can do this one yourself. Substitute al-Qaida or Taliban for Babylon and read Steve's paragraph again.

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### **PROGNOSIS: Sufficient Righteousness**

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : I Will Cause a Righteous Branch to Spring up for David (v. 15)

If only Zedekiah and Judah had ears to hear Jeremiah, they would hear not only words of judgment but also words of promise. Indeed, the text for today is that promise. Read it now in its entirety! The first thing to note is that "the days [that] are surely coming" have come! They have come in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The old adage holds true. It takes the fulfillment of a prophecy to fully understand the meaning of a prophecy. Who is Jesus Christ? He is that "righteous branch" that "the God who made the earth" himself has caused "to spring up for David" (v. 15). Note, not from David, but for David. David and his posterity do not have sufficient righteousness to prevail against the wrath of God, so thoroughly are they enmeshed in their own "wickedness." But Jesus Christ does! By taking on human flesh and by going to the cross, Jesus Christ enters into our misery and identifies completely with our condition, becoming subject to the very wrath of God that we ourselves are subject to. But because he is, in himself, the righteous Son of God, and in no way deserving of such wrath and death, he has the right, confirmed in the fact that God raised him from the dead, to take the rod of God's wrath out of God's hand, laying it down forever. In Christ a new kind of "execution of justice and righteousness" emerges, a righteousness that is characterized by these words: "I will forgive all the guilt of

their sin and rebellion against me" (33:8). The Lord [Jesus] is the "righteous branch" (v. 16) as the prophet Jeremiah prophesied. He is able to take the sting of God's wrath out of the hands of all our enemies, establishing himself as the source of salvation and safety (v. 16) before God.

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Crossing to USA Today.

This one too is a do-it-yourself.

How about this? For these final three "Good News" GROUNDING paragraphs, you readers (some I hope) send me your three-paragraph proposals for proclaiming this Good News to those grim-faced gray-uniformed West Point cadets. I'll post them (some of them, if I get too many) as next week's NUMBER 600 Thursday Theology. At ThTh#500 a number of you provided the prose and I had a day off. I'd enjoy the same for #600.

Send it not to the Crossings info address, but to my address (*removed for spamming reasons.*)

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Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Embracing the Promise of God: "The Lord is our righteousness" (v. 16)

Of course, the good news is not simply that Jesus is righteous in himself and hence, not subject to the wrath of God. Even more, the good news is that he is our righteousness. How so? By faith! Not by trying to shut-up the word and its medium in some prison, but by embracing the promise (and the medium) with thanksgiving (33:11). Just as Christ in his incarnation and death completely comes under God's wrath because of our wickedness, so because of our faith, our embrace of him, we come under his righteousness, totally and completely. Jesus Christ is



the end of God's wrath for all those who have faith. If that is presumptuous, it is being presumptuous in Christ, not in ourselves.

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Crossing to USA Today.

Do it yourself and if you wish, send it to me.

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Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Saved and Living in Safety (v. 15)

Although human enemies, like the Babylonians, may still threaten us, they are really nothing when they are bereft of being the rod of God's wrath. Indeed, they may even be conquerable in military terms. But even if they aren't, and the land in which we live is lost, and our calling is simply to bear the cross, we are not really defeated. For we have the promise of a righteousness that will bear fruit forever: keeping us safe within "the steadfast love of God" (v. 11) in Christ. Indeed, we might find ourselves living like Jeremiah: speaking words of warning and promise, all to the ultimate end that the world might be saved and live in safety (v. 15).

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Crossing to USA Today.

Do it yourself and if you wish, send it to me.

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Even in these dire days—especially in these dire days—  
Christ's Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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# **Primacy of Popes and the Promise. A Review of O'Malley's "The History of the Popes"**

Colleagues,

This week's ThTh posting is Steve Krueger's review of a book just out on the papacy. As you readers know from past postings coming from Steve, he has become our community's Augsburg Catholic "peritus" on the Roman Catholic church. [Peritus is the RC term for expert.] Here's more of the same.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **Primacy of Popes and the Promise**

**A Review of THE HISTORY OF THE POPES by John W. O'Malley, S.J.**

**(Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010),**

**349 pages hardcover. \$26.95 U.S.**

When Ed Schroeder enlisted Fr. Hans Küng's 2005 essay "Crisis in the Catholic Church: The Pope's Contradictions" (ThTh #359, April 28, 2005) for a perspective on the meaning of the death of John Paul II and the election of Benedict XVI, completely absent

from the assessment was an earlier optimism about the ecumenical possibilities Lutheran and Roman Catholic dialogue partners believed they had seen related to the papacy. The common hopes had been published in "Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V" under the theme PAPAL PRIMACY AND THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH (ed. Paul Empie and T. Austin Murphy, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974).

In the Common Statement from Dialogue V, Lutherans had then been asking their fellows from the participating Lutheran churches if the time hadn't arrived for Lutherans "to affirm with us that papal primacy, renewed in the light of the gospel" be now seen more as a gift than a barrier to the reunification of the churches (pp. 22-23). Likewise, Roman Catholic participants asked their own tradition if Lutherans could not be afforded structures for self-governance which could co-exist with a renewed papal primacy to "respect their (the Lutherans') heritage" and "protect their legitimate traditions" (p. 23).

As Schroeder's ThTh #359 ("Reflections on the Roman Papacy") unpacked Küng's take on the situation as it stood in 2005, it was abundantly clear that whatever positive enthusiasm may have existed 31 years earlier about the papacy, it had absolutely vanished (in Küng's opinion, of course). What Schroeder particularly noticed about Küng's reading of where things stood post John Paul II was that the "renewed in the light of the gospel" part of the dialogue partners' hope about the papacy had really never materialized. According to Küng (ala Schroeder), that hope still lay on the horizon as it had in the 16th century when AC 28 was written with the exact same hope in mind. In Küng's words (cited by EHS): "New hope will only begin to take root when church officials in Rome and the episcopacy reorient themselves toward the compass of the Gospel."

The question for many of us is, "Why is it so hard and does it

remain so elusive for the papacy to reclaim (assuming it was ever there to begin with) the compass of the Gospel with seemingly so much at stake (including the reunification of churches who confess the 'satis est' of AC VII, that it is sufficient for the true unity of the church that it have achieved consensus on the gospel and the sacraments)?"

Of course, in answer, with a myriad of partisan ideologies aside, honest history can go a long way toward helping us better grasp why the papacy evolved quite the way it did. And to that end we are pleased to point to one new resource by Fr. John W. O'Malley, S.J. of Georgetown University whose A HISTORY OF THE POPES is a very readable and discussable mainstay toward a better understanding of "the oldest living institution in the Western world" (page x).

1. One Telling Clue: Papal History is the Story of Some Men A HISTORY OF THE POPES (hereafter AHP) grew out of the author's thirty-six lectures recorded for Now You Know Media. Thus, from its inception, the book emerged from a highly communicative, conversational style which makes it successful to meet the author's goal to "make clear the basic story line in a way accessible to the general reader" (ix). Given the huge expanse of history which the narrative covers, to write about it well, as the author ably does, is no small feat. What makes AHP a stand-out resource is its reliable "leaner narrative" which provides "a recognizable path through complicated terrain," able to satisfy the curiosity of the general reader and the more exacting needs of the scholar who may be seeking deeper meanings and conclusions (ix).

O'Malley's title is a tip-off at the outset to an important conclusion he makes about the papacy (which carries throughout its 2000 year history). The history of the papacy is the story of some 265 individuals besides

Peter and Benedict XVI today. Thus, to O'Malley, "the history of the popes is not a history of Catholicism, which is a much, much bigger reality" (xii). Nor is the history one of a monolithic institution about which many timeless conclusions can be drawn and often are. To tell the story accurately is to tell what happened to some men who happened to become through a variety of means the bishop of Rome.

To the author, one of the contemporary temptations is to over-inflate the importance of the papacy for understanding Catholicism (both for Catholics and non-Catholics). Here is where the historian can provide something of a corrective which, among other things, can help keep the significance of the papacy in perspective for something like intra-faith dialogues noted above. To that end, O'Malley reminds that in the year 1200, probably no more than two per cent of the population was even aware there was such a thing called a pope who may have claimed primacy over other bishops. "The papacy was not mentioned in any creed, and it did not appear in any catechism until the sixteenth century" (xii-xiii). As a matter of fact, O'Malley attributes the broadcasting of the papal institution to the Reformation and to the invention of the printing press. Only "with Protestant rejection" (of the papacy) and with it the countering of "Catholic preoccupation" that "to be Catholic was to define oneself a papist" (xiii).

Thus, it was men who comprised the papal history. Their job descriptions changed dramatically beyond being bishop of Rome; their strategies differed, too, depending on the shapes and influences of the world-wide political scene. Their relationships with secular authority evolved with history as well. Yet, it is liberating quietly to notice

with the historian that, aside from the belief about the apostolic place of the one who was chosen to be the bishop of Rome as Peter's successor, popes were many other things historically. Yet, none of these other things either implicitly or explicitly was ever meant to preempt the primacy of the Christic Promise around which the church has always ideally found its true unity and its purpose.

## 2. Four Defining Moments of Papal History"Four defining moments of papal history can serve as milestones in what sometimes seems like a zigzag course" (xiv).

AHP organizes its narrative around four events, each representing a monumental change for the individuals who would live out the meaning of those historic shifts. First is the foundational martyrdom of both Peter and Paul in Rome (circa 64) upon which all subsequent claims about the papacy are grounded. Second is the rise of Constantine as emperor and the emergence of an identifiable episcopacy in the socio-political life of the empire in the fourth century. Third is the coalescing of the Papal States in the eighth and ninth centuries creating papal temporal rulers (of sorts). Fourth is the break-up of the States in 1860-1870 as Rome became the secular capital of Italy in the Lateran agreement.

The last change is frequently associated with Ultramontanism, a growing movement of pro-papal power (ultramontane, "other side of the mountain" or Alps) which followed the breakup of the Gallican church (after the French Revolution) and which carries through (in the author's opinion) into contemporary Catholicism today. As Küng noted in 2005, John Paul II's church remained heavily influenced by Ultramontanism, despite the efforts of Vatican II for a more conciliatory authority of popes collaborating collegially with bishops. So, one of Fr.

O'Malley's last lines would agree: "Catholics today live in an essentially Ultramontanist church" (329).

It is this historic key of how history has shaped today's papal office, as a papacy of Vatican I seeking to live in a post Vatican II world, that, among other things, may help unlock where ecumenical dialogues may yet fruitfully go, at least among those who find something of their identity in the Reformation era where papal issues were nuanced differently than they were at Vatican I and beyond. Again, where the issue can become the primacy of the Promise, there can be hopeful discussions yet to unfold. For Roman Catholics, however, it would mean moving beyond being "an essentially Ultramontanist church."

3. A Surprising ToughnessDespite the ebb and flow of the papacy as it comes to us today, however, what is most remarkable of all is why we all still care about it as we do and why it persists as it does. Perhaps those are the two most compelling of all the questions the reader might bring to AHP. As a Missouri Synod Lutheran boy, there wasn't much good I remember hearing about pope or papacy from my tradition until I began learning that despite the pope being the Anti-Christ from our theological heritage, there had been a Council going on in the 1960s that had been saying some awfully interesting things enabled by a pope who you couldn't help but feel belonged to the world, even ours, and was beloved.

For some reason, therefore, for most, Catholics and non-Catholics alike (and those of us who see ourselves as fitting into both camps and call ourselves "Augsburg Catholics" and the like), it is not possible not to care about pope or papacy today. He and it persist, I suppose, because it is difficult to imagine a world or a church without "the oldest, still functioning institution in the

Western world" (324). The papal institution has exhibited a surprising toughness.

The debate will continue about why the institution, one which Protestantism has tried to live without, persists anyway. Some Protestants have come to see its absence as a glaring weakness in their own many traditions. Some Catholics (e.g., Küng), argue just the opposite: that the papacy itself remains hopelessly out of touch and flawed, yet carefully guarding its power, so much so, that the Promising Gospel is the main casualty of an unregenerate papacy. Yet O'Malley's history would remind in conclusion, "The history of the papacy, let it be said again, is not the history of Catholicism" (325). We are asked, if we can, not to judge the faith by the one who would be seen as its human pastoral leader. That lesson is precisely what AHP would teach us already from the first legend of Peter running away from Rome until he met the Lord and asked, "Quo vadis, Domine?" ("Where are you going, Lord?").

That question about the institution called the papacy persists most of all and its current issues are well presented by John O'Malley's A HISTORY OF THE POPES. It's an excellent addition to any serious theological library but it's also an approachable story for the general reader which most everyone will find as a good and compelling introduction to these important men of Christian history.

Of the papacy, all of us, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, seemingly keep asking, "Quo vadis, Domine?" Hopefully, the future will answer with Küng's concern first and foremost about reorienting all things involving the papacy to the "compass of the Gospel."



Pastor Stephen Krueger  
Sun City Center, Florida  
Christ the King, 2009

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# Sample Sermon on an Apocalyptic Text.

Colleagues,

Ron Neustadt is pastor of St. Mark Lutheran congregation in Belleville, Illinois, just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri. At last week's monthly gathering of our ELCA ministerial association, he was the proclaimer for our opening liturgy. His text was last Sunday's apocalyptic Gospel from Mark 13.

You've seen Ron's name in ThTh posts before. Last year he and I team-taught a course in the Lutheran Confessions for some folks in Springfield, Illinois. We posted the class handouts to you ThTh readers for several weeks as we were cranking them out. [If curious, pull up the ThTh offerings for 2008 at <[www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org)> and check them out. First one was on January 24. The sequence comes under the rubric "The Augsburg Aha!"]

From what follows, you'll see that Ron hasn't lost his touch. In this homily he's putting the touch on all of us—especially us preacher-types—as he pushes that Augsburg Aha! and Jesus' words in the Mark 13 apocalypse right smack into the “touchy” center of his own pastoral calling. [Remember, the literal Greek meaning of apo-calypse is “un-veiling.” When Jesus switches into apocalyptic mode, he's blowing the cover—not just on world

history, but on our human interiors as well. Ditto for Ron.]

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **24th Sunday after Pentecost**

**Mark 13:1-8**

**Thursday 12 November 2009**

Dear Lord, what was I thinking? Why did I agree to preach this morning? When Freda asked me, why didn't I explain to her how busy I am right now?

Besides that, these aren't exactly the easiest texts in the world, you know. The "little apocalypse from Mark?" Dear Lord!

A voice: Yes?

Ron: Huh?

A voice [hereafter V]: I said, "Yes?" – You WERE talking to ME, weren't you? "Dear Lord" you said. Actually it came out "DEAR LORD!" but I interpreted it in the kindest possible way.

Ron [hereafter R]: Well, thank you. And, uh, ... I'm sorry for the way I said it.

V: Absolvo te. But let's get to the real problem.

R: And that is?

V: Your reluctance to preach. What's that all about?

R: Well, I AM busy. You should know that.

V: Oh, I know you're busy, all right. In fact, I'd say close to

being overwhelmed. (As a matter of fact, so are all those dear children sitting out there. Why is it that you've done that to yourselves? Do you really think that you're going to make everything turn out all right by just trying harder and harder and harder?)

I know you're busy, Neustadt, and that's something we need to talk about sometime soon – not because you say YES to so much, but because too often you say Yes in order to get approval from others (or avoid disapproval) and not because you are all that eager to do what you agree to do.

But that's another conversation. Right now, the issue is that there are people sitting out there who are busy, too – just as busy as you are – and some of them are facing their own apocalypses right now. And I want them to hear some Good News – honest to ME Good News.

R: I know. ... I know. But that's not making it any easier for me.

V: You're finding it hard to speak Good News to your colleagues?

R: It's not that I don't want to. It's just ... it ... it's just ...

V: I know what it is. You don't always trust MY Good News yourself. You find other things to trust in.

Don't think I'm unaware of how you have been content to rely on that set-up you've got with St. George's. [Ron's St. Mark Lutheran congregation has for years and years been happily yoked with St. George Episcopal in Belleville, all under one roof in mutually blessed symbiosis.] "Look at the size of those stones." Three buildings worth! And nice looking buildings, at that. And "Look at the size of that pipe organ."

And don't you think I'm aware of how you like to rely on your reputation? And on your rightness? And don't you think I know

how you USED to enjoy looking at the balance in your retirement fund – and how you used to be impressed with that, too?

No wonder you sometimes have a hard time sharing my Good News with others. You don't always trust it YOURSELF. You've got OTHER things that impress you.

(silence)

R: What can I say? You've nailed me.

V: Only in the hope that you will not get nailed big time down the road.

R: Say again?

V: The fact is, there are apocalypses yet to come – and even they are but foreshadowings of the Big One.

And I don't want you to have to go through any of them, and get nailed, and have that be the end of you.

Au contraire, Neustadt. I want you to survive those apocalypses – all of them, even the Big One – and to have the peace of knowing now that you will survive them.

That's where you are only partly right when you say that I nailed you.

R: But you did nail me.

V: Yes, but only to have you turn away from looking at all those large stones that impress you so. Because if you keep looking to those things for your future, you're headed for some big trouble – because sooner or later they will all be pulled down. Not just your retirement fund, but everything.

THEN YOU WOULD HAVE ME TO ANSWER TO – and that's when you REALLY

would have nothing to say!

R: That, I gather, is what you don't want to have happen.

V: Right. What I want to have happen is for you (and all my friends out there) to know that you (and they) can count on my son to see you through your apocalypses – even the Big One. After all, my son knows the way. He's travelled it himself. . . .

Ah, my son. What that boy went through! Talk about getting nailed! Now there was an apocalypse ... Well, you know what happened. The point is, that was for YOU. That's how dear you are to us.

R: To both of you?

V: Absolutely. He'll see you through. He's promised. And he has my full support. (I can't tell you how proud I am of that boy!)

If you have any doubts about all this, take him up on his invitation. Eat and Drink. And don't forget what he has done for you. Don't forget how dear you are to us.

R: What can I say? Thanks!

V: It's my pleasure.

Now ... there are some of my friends out there (your friends, too) who are going through some little apocalypses themselves right now.

R: I know. Or, at least, I know about some. And I think I know what you have in mind.

V: Yes, you do. I have mentioned it, haven't I.

R: I'll do my best to remind them, dear Lord. I will do my best

to remind them. . . .

“...the beginning of the BIRTHPANGS,” you say.

V: That’s right.

R: I’ll do my best to remind them.

Ronald C. Neustadt  
Belleville, Illinois

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## **79 is a Prime Number. Some Ramblings on Passing that Prime.**

Colleagues,

Rambling

1. 79 is a prime number. Last week I passed that prime. Was it my last prime? The next prime number is 83. Bob Bertram, my theological mentor for 60 years, died just days before reaching 83. Many of my seminary classmates, significant others all of them—Walt Rast, Andy Weyermann, Walt Bouman—never got close to my prime number. Is this one my last prime? Am I past my prime? When do you know that you’ve passed your prime? Elert once said (don’t remember the context, possibly in his ethics book): “Not easy to tell. It’s like driving in the mountains. You don’t notice the moment when you’ve actually reached the crest. Afterwards—as you look into the rearview mirror you

notice—sure enough it was higher back there.”

2. Speaking of Elert, another major mentor, guess what I got for my birthday last Friday? Besides the “Harry and David” box of fancy pears and other tokens of love and affection, Bruce Martin, second generation Crossings “kid,” blessed me with fancy-dancy state-of-the art preservation of an Elert original manuscript that’s been in my files since 1953. It’s an essay Elert wrote for THE SEMINARIAN, the student theological journal of Concordia Seminary (St. Louis), which Dick Baepler and I then translated and published in the Reformation Day issue that year, our last year at the seminary. Way back at the (almost) beginning of these Thursday posts, ThTh #28, it went out to the listserve. Here’s where to find it:<https://crossings.org/thursday/1998/thur1210.shtml> What makes this preservation super-special is that Elert’s cover letter to me is dated on my natal day Nov. 6, 1953. I hope to display this treasure at the January Crossings conference. But no sticky fingers, please. I transacted with Bruce to get that job done. So it wasn’t a complete surprise. But it did arrive on Nov. 6. And, as if that weren’t enough, Bruce put even more frosting on the cake—really a whole second cake—and tucked into the package an authentic—also super-preserved and elegantly-displayed—original page from a Biblia Latina of 1531 (when Luther was a mere 48). And guess what text is on that ancient page! It’s 2 Corinthians chapters 5,6,7, with those Sweet Swap verses right at the top! What a guy! [Bruce is a regular in the text studies Crossings offers, most recently just two weeks ago. For more info on Bruce’s niche-ministry in preserving ancient Bibles, check out this URL <http://www.historicbibles.com> Yes, this is a plug for a patron.]
3. When did I pass my prime, look into the mirror and notice

that the crest was higher behind me? That thought was pressed upon me not long ago in our own Bethel Lutheran congregation here in St. Louis. We've got half a dozen retired pastors at Bethel. That is a mixed blessing, I'm sure, to our own pastors Bill Yancey and Rebecca Boardman, as well as to the stream of interns that come our way year after year. At our ELCA Central States synod gathering this summer a number of us—retirees and current incumbents—were publicly recognized for pastoral “survival,” aka anniversary of ordination. One only 5 years, one all the way up to 60. I was in the middle at 40. For the Bethel Adult Forum we've been asked to take a Sunday and “tell us about your ministry.” It's a mountaintop every Sunday. Possibly even mine—for me for sure—a couple of weeks ago.

4. Where was that mountaintop? Where the crest? I couldn't tell. I've been blessed with so many. It's a sierra chain of peaks. And if I hadn't looked back, I might never have known.

A. The childhood (already a peak? Well maybe) growing up in a Germanic Schroeder clan of farmers. Grandpa and Grandma immigrants with minimal formal education, but smart, smart, smart and committed Lutherans. Parochial grade school, super-good for the reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, for memorizing the catechism, Bible verses and hymns. Also super-good(?) in inculcating Missouri Synod biblicist faith.

B. After rural high school (where I was a track star! Well, sortuv. I was #1 in the mile Run for Rock Island county rural highschoools in 1947) came Valparaiso University. Here the biblicism was undermined by super teachers, J. Pelikan, R. Luecke, R. Bertram. But not completely. My senior paper in religion in the “president's class” offered the full



proof that God would never ever consent to women pastors. OK, so I left Valpo schizophrenic.

C. Concordia Seminary where Doc Caemmerer taught me the Gospel. And lots of other stuff—as much of it from the great guys (yes, all guys) in the huge student body of 700 or so, as from some profs who had discovered non-biblicist Lutheran theology.

D. One year in Germany before seminary graduation where Leonhard Goppelt taught us where to find the gospel in the NT and Werner Elert taught us how to use Lutheran lenses to read that Gospel aright. And then after seminary graduation (1955) back to Germany, just married to Marie who had gotten a Fulbright overseas scholarship upon her graduation from Washington U. in St. Louis. Eventual doctorate at Hamburg University with Helmuth Thielicke as my Doktorvater.

5. Interlude. Those are points of prominence that shaped my life and still do. Each human life has such a series, maybe even a sierra. But the mountaintops on my sierra chain come after all that. There are five that I see when I look into the mirror.

- Teaching at Valpo 1957-71,
- The Wars of Missouri and Seminex 1971-83,
- Crossings 1983-93,
- Global Mission Volunteer service 1994-2004,
- In, with, under the most recent peak, internet theologizing with 596 editions of ThTh and a passel of Sabbatheology postings before that going back 14 years.

Herewith a smidgin about each of those.

6. Teaching at Valparaiso University enwebbed me with Bob Bertram again, he now the newly designated head of the

theology department, and Bob Schultz (recently bedoctored from Erlangen) on the other side of the bookcases in the faculty office we shared. The three of us became the committee to fashion and test-before-inflicting the new curriculum that trademarked Valpo for nigh onto a decade. It was the primordial soup in the evolution of Crossings. We called it New Testament Readings. We used the pericopes from the Sunday liturgy and built out from there in two directions. One into the centuries of Christian theology, all of it finally variations on the interpretation of those Biblical texts. The other into the life and culture of our students with a focus on their life and work after they got their diplomas. Sure there was hassle on many fronts. Even so, it was Camelot! It was Brigadoon! But it didn't last. I once bemoaned that demise to Prof. Goppelt back in Germany. His counsel: "Herr Schroeder, no mountaintop events ever last. If you've had 6 or 7 years, you've been blessed beyond measure. Rejoice for what you've been given."

7. Seminex. The complete who-would-have-guessed-it of Seminex coming out of the Wars of Missouri amazes me still. I've bubbled enough (more than enough) in these ThTh posts about that. Sure there was hassle on many fronts. Even so, it was Camelot! It was Brigadoon! But it didn't last. I remembered Goppelt's counsel.
8. Then Crossings. It is still lasting. Are there exceptions to Goppelt's axiom? Big changes, of course, from the first decade when Bob and I did all the workshops, all the semester-long courses. Now in the hands of the takeover generation, much of it transpires via Internet which didn't exist when it got started. But it's great fun and if I didn't have these ThTh options for venting, I'd probably not have made it to this 79-prime. And the just plain joy of the folks gathering at the Crossings

conferences with #3 coming up in two months.

9. Global Mission Volunteer stuff. Marie and I have been all over the world. Seventy countries by last count. Folks sometimes ask us: Where in the world would you wish to settle down (?) if you ever moved from the USA? Our constant answer: "Can't say. What makes all those mission venues so dear is not the exotic surroundings, but the people, the faith-siblings we now have in all those places. Best way we've found so far to stay connected with them is to stay home and check our email." Our email address book now has a thousand listings. Melded into these journeys into all continents except Antarctica is my late-in-life waking up to missiology. Learning the linkage between promissio, confessio, missio—God's promise, our confessing it, our promoting it—and the fun (yes, fun—also with hassles) that that has been. If you want to witness a smidgin of that "live," come to the January conference and engage Roman Catholic frontline missiologist Bill Burrows in shop-talk about mission and promise. He's in favor of it. There are many other highpoints in that conference program. E.g., Fred Danker (of last week's ThTh post) being interviewed by yours truly on Mission Theology in the Gospel of Luke. It promises to be a collection of peaks on its own. Stuff you'll never get anywhere else. And you could be there.
10. Finally back to Thursday Theology, the present peak, and its nearly 12-year run—where you readers are the grounds for rejoicing. Is the crest on this one already behind me too? Can't tell. Can't find the proper mirror yet to check. So I don't. The Crossings website logs say "not yet." Number of daily hits at the website (over 2K now) are increasing. What the weekly posts are you know. What you may not know is that ThTh entails not only the weekly concocting, but the conversation generated by the steady

feedback flow that happens from one Thursday to the next. In individual cases that back-and-forth persists for weeks and even longer. To call it theological mentoring in cyberspace may be a bit exaggerated, but that's what it seems to be. Such "intrusions" into my intended daily schedule remind me of Henri Nouwen's bon mot: "I used to complain to God about all the interruptions that kept me from my daily work. Then one day it came to me: these interruptions ARE my daily work." But at prime 79 I'm not as speedy as I was that day in 1947 when I did the mile run, not only on the track, but also in the head.

Summa. It's been a marvelous ride on that sierra for this padre. When should I bring ThTh to closure? At number 600—just four weeks away? Next year on Nov. 6—at full four score—if I'm still alive, still sentient? When the Crossings board relieves me of my duties? When God does? I think about that, but not very much—yet.

"Prime" is also a verb in English. So at prime 79 this seems plausible: so long as God keeps priming the pump, I'll stay at the pump handle.

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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## Two New Books from Old Seminex Colleagues

Colleagues,

Two for the price of one. No, not the books, but the review. And as long-time ThTh readers know, a straightforward “review” is seldom what you get in a ThTh book review. This one will likely be no exception. But instead of an extended debate with the author (and often lots of others) by this reviewer—as frequently happens—this time it’s extended narrative about the two dear authors. And dear they are.

But first the two books just off the press:

***Frederick William Danker.***

***The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.***

***University of Chicago Press. 2009. 390 pp. Hardcover.***

***List \$55, (Amazon \$44) Robert H. Smith.***

***Wounded Lord: Reading John Through the Eyes of Thomas: A Pastoral and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel.***

***Ed. Donna Duensing. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books. 2009 202 pp. Paper.***

***\$24 (Amazon)***

I’ve known Fred and Bob since the early 1950s. Bob was my classmate at Concordia Seminary, my colleague at Seminex, my next door neighbor for many years on Aberdeen Place just two blocks away from “the sem,” etcetera, etcetera. Marie and I visited Bob out in California at the Lutheran Seminary in Berkeley as he was coping with his third (and final) in a string of cancers, conscious that his time was short and pushing hard to finish this commentary of John’s Gospel. So I’ve read his last will and testament as more, much more, than “just a book.” Bob’s widow, Donna Duensing (also a staffer at the seminary), has seen the manuscript through to publication. Bob’s dates are 1932-2006.

Fred Danker is half-a-generation older than Bob (and me too, coming up on 79 tomorrow), born July 1920 That means he’s coming

up on his 90th birthday. His wife Lois, as much a superstar as Fred in her own many callings, died a year ago. Marie and I have been neighboring with Lois and Fred since 1995 when we left our house near that (in)famous sem, and moved into the Adlon Condominium building in midtown St. Louis. Fred and Lois had come here some years before. 'Fact is, they "invited us in" by alerting us to the For Sale sign. So we've almost "been family" and now even more so with Fred after Lois's demise. He's at our supper table several evenings per week.

Conversations with Fred cover the spectrum of national politics, life (or death) in the church, baseball (where Fred is more in the know than I am, especially about the St. Louis Cardinals and the NY Yankees—and besides I'm a Chicago Cubs fan). Oh, yes, and tennis. With every major international tennis match Fred instructs both Marie and me about what the Williams sisters will or won't be able to do this time.

Often it's about words—Greek, of course, Latin, English, German, and other tongues. Where does that word come from? Why those curious multiple meanings? Yes, now and then we wind up in Sanskrit and with the empty space on the supper table covered with Webster, the OED, other dictionaries, a volume or two from the Encyclopedia Britannica, the German Brockhaus, and, of course, Fred's own magnum opus Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 1100 double-columned pages (five-and-one-half pounds) from 2000.

We really ought to sell tickets and set up some extra chairs.

Fred's new book listed above, The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, is not a scissors-and-paste 67% reduction of his magnum opus mentioned above, affectionately known as BDAG ("bee-dag") in the community of NT scholars. [B for Bauer (author of the first German edition in 1928), D for Danker (3rd

English edition, 2000) and A and G for Arndt and Gingerich (whose first and then second editions got Bauer to speak English beginning in 1957).]

Scissors-and-paste skeletal-version? “Oh, no,” he says, “it’s brand new from the first page to the last. That’s what the U.of Chicago Press wanted, so that’s what I had in mind from p. 1 to 390.” What he had in mind! Yes, that’s the mind-blowing thing. That’s why he’s the world’s #1 lexicographer for New Testament Greek. That’s why he was so honored this past August at the SNTS [Society for New Testament Studies] at the international scholars get-together in Vienna. He has it all in his head.

When he spoke those quoted words above, I told him what had just happened a day earlier as Marie and I took one of our frequent walks in the Missouri Botanical Garden not far from our home. We met a Garden staffer pruning one of the exotic trees. I asked him: How do you know which branch to cut and which one to leave? He tapped his forehead and said: “It’s all up here.”

Most all of you know that I’m not competent to review Fred’s new lexicon, even though I know a little Greek. So this is a promo piece. If you want to know what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and all the rest are really saying, get a copy. It weighs four pounds less than BDAG. That’s a blessing right there. Fits lightly into your suitcase alongside your laptop when you travel. And Amazon currently is giving a 20% discount.

Now to Bob Smith’s commentary on John’s Gospel. The title says it all: “Wounded Lord. Reading John Through the Eyes of Thomas: A Pastoral and Theological Commentary.”

Reading through the eyes of Thomas signals the final episode in John’s Easter account in chapter 20. “Unless the death marks are still there in the resurrected Jesus, he is not my Lord and my God.” That’s how Bob reads Thomas’ response to the other

disciples. Thomas is not—repeat not—a “doubter.” That standard label for Thomas is a misnomer. Even worse, it represents a misunderstanding of why St. John (and John alone) puts Thomas here at the very end of his Gospel. But not as an incurable skeptic. He was there to see and hear the “Lazarus, come out!” event. Been there, witnessed that.

Smith turns the tables on Thomas’ bad reputation. Thomas is the good-guy disciple, the final witness to the truth of Jesus. Thomas speaks for the evangelist himself. He says it point-blank—just in case you’ve missed it in the preceding 19 chapters. To be anybody’s Lord and God, you have to kill the killer-virus that terminates all sinners. Is the resurrected Jesus still “the (wounded) Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world?” If so, the death-marks will be there. Should they disappear, then death is still “Lord and God,” and we need to search for another savior.

Bob presents John’s Gospel as a radical “*theologia crucis*,” the theology of the cross. He tracks Thomas’ confession at the end as the *cantus firmus* throughout the entire Gospel, from the prologue in chapter one to the epilogue chapter 21. Bob sees all John’s key (and sometimes novel) predicates for Jesus as cruciform. As you go with Bob chapter after chapter, it becomes a long list: word, light, hour, temple, water, bread, glory, work, shepherd, way, vine, joy, truth, life, love, paraclete, new commandment, peace, power and more.

Yes, it’s a tour-de-force—and very compelling. Though Bob is in conversation with other scholars as he goes along, there are no footnotes. He calls it a pastoral and theological commentary. Indeed it is. It’s Bob’s own last sermon, himself doing what John says he was doing throughout his Gospel: “These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” One



more time: Remember the death marks do not challenge his being your Lord and God. They are the marks that verify those titles.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. There was an epic event in Seminex's history where Bob Smith and Fred Danker were the principals. An unforgettable pas-de-deux. It happened during a faculty meeting, where we'd gathered to decide whether or not we'd approve our first woman graduate for ordination as pastor. She was a brilliant student, but she was a woman, and we all grew up in the Missouri Synod where that was a no-no.

Bob chaired the meeting. In his Quaker-style leadership he seldom called for votes. Instead he'd let us talk and talk and then when he divined the "sense of the meeting," he'd put it into words. Nine times out of ten we all agreed: "That's exactly what I've been saying."

After our long discussion on this one, Bob said: "Colleagues, I think I hear a consensus. No one among us sees any significant grounds—either in the Scriptures or in our Lutheran Confessions—to prevent us from certifying Ms. X for ordination to the holy ministry. Do we all agree on that?" Fred raises his hand: "I don't agree on that." Bob: "Fred, you've sat here for two hours like the rest of us and you haven't said boo. And now you say No. What's going on?" Fred: "I'm against the ordination of anybody. It's not in the New Testament!"

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**“I held an umbrella . . .  
until we got through the  
resurrection.”**

Colleagues,

Now there's a title for a sermon next Easter Sunday!

No, that topic sentence was not written by a madman. It comes from Loren Bliese, telling us of his most recent mission out in the desert in Ethiopia. When you read it in his narrative below, it does make sense.

Loren and Edith Bliese were mentors for Marie and me during our 1995 assignment as ELCA “Global Mission Volunteers” in Addis Ababa. [I was guest lecturer at the seminary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus [EECMY], Marie was helper-outer both in the library and for things calling for computer-competence in seminary administration.] The Blieses, pioneer missionaries from the American Lutheran Church, arrived in 1960, just one year after EECMY was constituted—and stayed for 48 years. Though they now live in Oregon, Loren (often accompanied by Edith, who founded and managed a Christian school in Addis) goes back a couple of times each year to continue his Bible translation work in some of the minority-people languages in Ethiopia. Depending on which expert you ask, there are 90—or maybe just 78—different languages among Ethiopia's 82.5 million inhabitants. Imagine that, 90 languages in a country not quite twice as big as Texas!

Loren has already worked on Bible translations in 27(!) of these languages. At the EECMY's 50th anniversary celebration in January he received an honorary doctorate (to add to his earned

one) for this monumental ministry. And he's at it still. Also on this retiree return visit. When he's there, we get weekly emails. Here are the last two. He's just returned from a two-week junket into the hinterlands to consult and listen to native speakers (mostly all Muslims) in order to get the Afar-language-translation he's now working on as "right" as can be done.

Want to hear how that umbrella/resurrection sentence fits into the story? Read on. That's not the only head-shaking item in Loren's narrative.

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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Oct 20, 09

Dear Family & Friends,

It is Tuesday noon and we are in Waldia. [Ed: Several hundred kilometers northeast of Addis.] Ali Nuriye and I left this morning from the desert after spending eight days there. God was with us, and the difficulties were minimal compared to the blessings. We started Monday morning from Addis Ababa, and arrived at Mille in the desert in the afternoon. One former hostel student met us and we took him part way toward the area he works in. It was raining hard when we filled up with diesel in Mille. We thanked God for the rain, since some areas we had come through were completely dry, with even the acacia brush dead. This is the end of the rains when there is normally good grass everywhere. Some spots had gotten rain and were green. It rained two nights while we were there, and grass had sprouted and yellow flowers were blooming by the time we left.

Since rain was threatening and the road was muddy, we stopped before dark at the school the Lutheran World Federation built at

Garri. The teachers gave us a classroom, so we didn't have to set up the tent. They have four grades with 30, 40, 30 and 17 students. It was good to see that they are functioning properly.

We went on to Chifra, and met with the LWF staff there for the rest of the morning. The river has undermined the Waqaama diversion dam so it is completely out of use, and would probably not be feasible to repair because of the extreme flooding from the highlands. I interviewed the health officer, who is teaching in discussion groups to change the practice of female circumcision. He gave me valuable information for my Ethiopian Study Conference paper I'm working on. He also gave me posters they had made of a lady who had a fistula for 25 years before they sent her to Addis Ababa where she was repaired. Later when I was distributing them in Alalesubla, the chief's son said the woman was from his father's village. When we later went there, they verified this, and I met two of her children. We thank God that people are really being helped by our programs.

It is now evening. We went to Mersa and Girana this afternoon and came back to the hotel. I got a bucket of warm water to pour over myself for a shower. That was nice after nine days. We met with the family of a former pastor in Girana, and were able to share a lot. The wife who was nursing a baby in a family picture I took in February [Loren's visit earlier this year] has gone to Kuwait to get a job and send money home. The baby was left with the family. He seemed happy enough, but it is hard to understand how they made this choice. The term is two years, and many never return, or come back sick. In fact one daughter had just returned from Saudi Arabia sick.

Sam's sister [Sam is the Blieses' adopted Ethiopian son, a baby handed to them on the day of his birth during the famine of 1973] Zewdit in Mersa was hospitalized with a bad kidney infection last spring, and has heart problems. Her 12th grade

daughter, who has been attending school in Bahr Dar for seven years, came home to be with her. Hopefully she will still make it through 12th grade in Mersa, although the quality of school won't be as good.

Last year on the desert we had a scorpion under our tent when we broke camp. This morning we had a 10-inch viper. The man I work with there had been bitten several years ago, and was very sick at that time. A girl in the chief's village died last year after being bitten. I thank God for his protection, according to his promise Luke 10:19 that we will even tread on snakes and scorpions and not be harmed.

I worked with a skilled person for three days, and with others for some hours going through about half of the words in the prophets and historical books of our translation. Besides the spelling corrections, it was especially useful to have the dialect input from this area. I also had good interviews in two villages about "cousin-marriages" and customs that harm women. When I get back to Addis I'll have lots of material to work into the paper I'm preparing to present.

We had a crazy or possessed man come while I was showing the Joseph film. [Ed: Loren connects his computer to the car battery, and the locals cram around the computer screen to see the show.] He reprimanded us, and told the people not to listen and be corrupted by our message. He tried to take my glasses, but I was able to hold on to them. After a half-hour of his ranting, some of the younger listeners overpowered him, tied him up and carried him away. I turned the film back on, and we finished it shortly after ten o'clock. The next night I showed the Jesus film until it started raining. I held an umbrella over the computer until we got through the resurrection. The third night there I showed a Navajo canyon film of a mountain lion and shepherd boys. That is always a favorite. I also showed part of

the David film. It is so far from the scripture, that I don't normally do so. Since they are in English, I summarized the Joseph and David films in their language as we went along for those sitting around me. Both Ali and I had the opportunity to answer questions about history, since by their [Muslim] teaching all those like David from Adam on are counted as followers of Islam.

We also showed films the three nights in the chief's village. There were over forty there. One son brought a film of Libya about how a sheik had led the struggle against the Italian invasion [of Ethiopia] in the 1930s. It was in Amharic, but its source was religious, of the Libyan variety. I reviewed parts of the three disks first, and saw that it was mainly war. When we showed it, only portions of each disc worked, which I appreciated. You can guess which side was cheered on when they blew up the others. It was a real education in religious loyalty, and identity with brothers of the faith. What I saw as mainly a war chronicle, had deep religious significance for them.

God can use even such events for his good. The next night they said yes when I offered the Jesus film, to which they had said no the first night. We showed it all the way through the final prayers to believe and be saved. The night we stayed in a third village the one in charge said to only show the lion and shepherd film.

I delivered several children's story books to each of the three schools in the area, as I had agreed to do in last year's confrontation. The local administrator who challenged me then, has been replaced, for which I thank God.

It is nearly bedtime, and tomorrow we are planning to leave early for Wachu, and visit Sam's relatives. I'll see if the

internet connection I bought works here. We are aiming to get back to Addis on Friday.

Love,  
Loren

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Oct 25, 09

Dear Family & Friends,

Thanks be to God for a safe and fruitful trip to the desert and Wallo. I got back to the Volunteer House at 8 Friday evening, eleven hours after leaving Dessie. We had another flat on the way, and parts of the road are under construction. I also spent over an hour in Addis in traffic jams, and missed a turnoff on the ring road in the dark. Rev. Nahum, the general secretary of the North Central Ethiopia Synod [of the EECMY], rode with us. He and Ali had a good time sharing about people they know in Wallo, and I shared Psalms and history of the American Lutheran Mission [Loren and Edith's first assignment in 1960 was to the region he visited on this trip]. We met Bishop Halvorson and Pastor Birhanu from the Northwest Washington Synod [ELCA] near Debre Sina. They are on a two-week visit to their sister Synod in the EECMY, and were accompanied by the Synod President.

We visited with the Finnish missionaries and other staff in the EECMY Synod office in Dessie Thursday before dark, and more on Friday morning. Akililu, the development program head, is preparing a paper on how the church can serve in the big irrigation development in the desert. He gave me his draft, which I edited in the evening, and I shared some of the research I have done, and showed him my paper on cross-cousin marriage. In the morning I gave the message in the staff devotions, using Luke 10 about how God worked during our time in the desert. I

closed with Isaiah 55 referring to the rain we had there, and how the dry desert had turned green with flowers by the time we left. We pray and trust that God will fulfill his promise that his word which was sown through the Jesus film will also bear fruit as he intends.

Ali and I spent Wednesday through Thursday morning in Arerit and Wachu, the home of Sam's birth relatives. A sister with seven kids, two aunts with two and four kids, and many cousins live there. Yimam, the teenage son of his sister, went to Saudi Arabia to look for work because of the poor crop this year. His mother's cousin Zemzem went to Djibouti last year and helped him get to Saudi from there. I pray for the many young people who are risking their health and lives by going to Arab countries for work. I showed the pictures I took in February while waiting in the house that Sam's sister's husband built in Arerit. They sell tea there on market days. Otherwise it isn't occupied. After walking to Wachu I spent the time mainly having the students read to me from an Amharic Bible story book. Except for two cousins, the older ones could read fairly well. They are in 5th and 6th grade in Arerit. The two cousins are in 4th and 5th grade, but can not read. The fourth grader doesn't even know the alphabet. I'm afraid they are just being passed to the next grade whether they learn or not. Many of the younger children are attending 1st and 2nd grade in Wachu, which is really good to see.

There is only one Christian family in Wachu. Bekele was a literacy teacher for our program there and in the desert back in the 70s. We visited with him, read scripture and had prayer. He gets together with some of Sam's male relatives for Bible reading. I pray for them regularly, that they will come to know Jesus as their Savior and not just as a prophet. I brought reading glasses for one cousin to whom I gave a Bible two years ago. I got prescription glasses for Bekele last year for his one



good eye. Bekele's daughter Yamrot has mental problems, and is getting better. Ali and I prayed for her healing a year ago, and we continue to pray for her. I took a picture of the family by the tree that Paul [a Bliese son] hung his hammock on over the edge of a cliff in the 70s. It was a meaningful time. I had to stop and rest three times climbing the hills the hour walk back to Arerit. From there it is an hour on a steep mountainous hand dug road with river crossings to the main road.

[Back in Addis] I spent Sat. morning unpacking and putting the camping things in my outside office storage area, and went shopping for fruits and vegetables. Zegayech [caretaker at the mission house] washed dishes, cleaned the house, baked cookies and cooked a hot dish. In the afternoon I started organizing pictures and notes from the trip. I also went to pump up a low tire. I'll have to have two flat tires from the trip repaired in Addis this week. I also plan to do more banking to pay the balance due on last year's Canaan [the school Edith founded] rent, and do some repairs on things that got broken on the trip. Then I plan to continue work on the spell-check word list for the prophets and historical books in the translation, and enter all the notes I gathered from interviews in the cross-cousin-marriage paper I'll present next week.

I thank God for health and protection, and for the opportunity to be his witness and servant.

Love,  
Loren

PS: I have run out of minutes on my email, so I'll buy some more and send this tomorrow.