

Memories, Memories—of Crossings, of SemineX

Colleagues,

Tucked into a secluded cyber-folder in my Macintosh I found two items from days gone by. Each one must have been composed for someone, but it is only for the second one that I still remember who that was. I think I still believe what I said then, so I don't hesitate to pass it on to the listserve today. After last week's longish review essay, these two more circumspect items won't take so much of your time.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Earliest Memories of Crossings

1. The earliest document I know of with the word Crossings in the caption is dated Jan. 6 (Epiphany – it was a Sunday), 1974. It was Bertram's proposal for what some of us might do if JAO Preus, president of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, continued his apparent program of picking off the notorious liberals on the Concordia Seminary faculty and thereby resolving the problem of false doctrine allegedly being taught by that faculty. [Go to <www.crossings.org> and click on Library, then on Works by Robert W. Bertram, and scroll down to "Crossings, Inc. (Saint Louis): A Proposal."]^{1a}. Prior to all this, of course, was the "new religion curriculum" at Valparaiso University beginning in 1957, brainstormed by Bob Bertram with Bob Schultz (arrived at VU in 1956) and EHS (arrived

in 1957) becoming the curriculum-creating subcommittee. That's spelled out in great detail in Bob's own "History of Crossings" on the website.

1b. And prior to that was Richard R. Caemmerer and the reformation of preaching the gospel in the LCMS in the 1940s and 1950s at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. In my mind the impact of Caemmerer shows in the 6-step sequence for text studies that has become the Crossings tradition. Caemmerer had only three: what is the MALADY pinpointed in this text? what is the text's GOAL? and what is the MEANS BY WHICH to get from malady to goal?

In Crossings' six steps Caemmerer's first step [MALADY] was expanded to three levels of diagnosis (initial, advanced, final) and that expansion to three levels came straight from the understanding of sin portrayed by the Augsburg Confession and its Apology. The MEANS BY WHICH to get to either of Caemmerer's two GOALS for any particular sermon was always the Good News of the crucified and risen Christ. That became Crossings' step 4. And the two types of GOALS in Caemmerer's model – "Lord, increase our faith" and "Lord, increase our love," became steps 5 and 6.

2. Now back to Seminex 1974. Exactly 14 days after that Epiphany 1974 date, almost to the hour, John Tietjen was suspended as president of Concordia Seminary by the Seminary Board. The purpose of that meeting on Epiphany evening had been to brainstorm how those of us on Preus's "villain list" might continue our callings even though we too might have been sacked from the Seminary faculty. That had already been happening with Arlis Ehlen and Paul Goetting, I think, as well as with the "forced retirement" that the Board was proposing for half a dozen senior faculty colleagues who were on the "wrong side" as far as Preus was concerned. Repp, Piepkorn, Caemmerer, Sauer,

Bouman, maybe Wuerffel.

3. Within 24 hours of Tietjen's suspension the student body addressed the Seminary Board, declaring a moratorium on class attendance "until such a time as you designate who the false teachers are that we should no longer listen to." 24 hours after that the faculty joined the students in that decision. So everything changed. It was no more individual villains being selected for sacrifice, but the whole faculty majority (45 folks) who four weeks later were summarily dismissed by the Board for not returning to work under the newly-appointed interim seminary president who was the major voice in the heresy charges against all the rest of us.
4. Thus Seminex was under way, although on that Epiphany weekend nobody was talking like that. And when Seminex then did become the direction for our continuing teaching and continuing learning, the Crossings option was put on the shelf. It didn't fit what the facts now were.
5. In the last couple semesters that Seminex was operating in St. Louis, Bob offered a couple seminars on the Word of God and Daily Work. But I'm not sure whether the word Crossings was used in publicizing what this seminar was going to do.
6. Bob wrote an extended early history of Crossings https://crossings.org/archive/bob/History_of_Crossings.pdf in 1996. As I recall, Bob links Crossings to large sections of his own personal theological development. And that's not inaccurate, though I was a much more public figure of the operation during the 10 years I was executive director, 1983-1993. Bob traces Crossings back to his own graduate studies at the University of Chicago in the late 1940s and his initial years of teaching at Valpo. I was one of his students during those "early years" at Valpo, doing a philosophy

major, and I don't remember the word Crossings used as descriptor for the way we were studying theology, but as he says in his own 1996 narrative, "never ask a 75-year-old professor to reminisce." [D.v., in a few days from today (10/22/09) my number will be 79. "Never ask a 79-year-old . . ."]

The Two Seminexes

Now and then over the years I have referred to "The Two Seminexes." earlier this year I received this inquiry:

"I do wonder about the two Seminex's that you referenced. I don't know that we have a chance to gather soon to hear you speak about that so if you could give me the abridged version of that, I would welcome same."

Here's my response:

Briefly.

One strand of Seminex's heritage and focal point for Seminex community members was the Bible-battle. LCMS prez Preus and old LCMS Biblicism vs. historical-critical method [HCM]. It was about Preus's political takeover and his (bleep) tactics all done under the "smokescreen" (Tietjen's term) of saving the Bible for the faithful in the LCMS. It was about church-leader-tyranny, justice and freedom, as well as a better way to read the Bible, better than the ancient LCMS way of doing so. When the term hermeneutics surfaced it was Biblicist hermeneutics vs. HCM hermeneutics.

Other strand said that it was a fight analogous to Augsburg 1530. Not fundamentally about the Bible, nor primarily (bleep) church-politics (though that was true), but about the Gospel

itself. How to understand –and promote–the Aha! at the center of the Lutheran Confessions. Focal point for this strand (Bertram, Schroeder, Fuerbringer, couple others) was the “other Gospel” (finally also carrying with it an “other” soteriology) present in that old strand of Missouri which both Preus brothers, Jacob and Robert–“alien Norwegian Lutherans who had crept into our camp”–picked up on, possibly believed themselves. So Bob Bertram’s book is titled A TIME FOR CONFESSING. When it comes to Biblical hermeneutics, the issue is NOT the historical-critical method, but the hermeneutics commended by the Lutheran Confessions.

[Primary essay on that is Bertram’s “THE HERMENEUTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF APOLOGY IV.” On the Crossings website–www.crossings.org– Click on “Library,” then “Works of RWB,” and scroll down to the title. Bob’s axiom: “Biblical hermeneutics is at no point separate from Biblical soteriology.” In nickel words: How you read the Bible is always linked to how you think people get saved.]

At four places during those ten years–1974-83–the tension really increased internally.

1. When Ralph Bohlmann, the new president at Concordia Seminary, threatened to sue if we didn’t stop calling ourselves “Concordia Seminary” in Exile. Group 2 said: “Good, we’ll be hauled in before magistrates to confess. Jesus predicts just such scenarios. We’ve got one!” Group 1 said “Go to court? Before magistrates? Come now, let’s be reasonable. We’ll change the name. We’re called Seminex now anyhow. So how about Christ-Seminary – Seminex?” And so it was.
2. May Massacre 1977. Seven colleagues – contracts not renewed. “Money is short, we just have to do it.” Others said: “During a time for confessing you can’t throw

anybody out of the boat. Let's go on reduced rations." The colleagues departed.

3. Internal governance. Bob Bertram's genius creation of a community "order" for our life together. A tour-de-force of two-kingdom organization for an outfit that was both a community of God's right hand and a community of God's left hand. The "rule" in this order was, said Bob, taken from the Dominicans at the time of their founding in the 13th century: The decision-makers shall be the consequence-takers, and the consequence-takers shall be the decision-makers. It was adopted—by the three "member classes" of Seminex's constitutional order—faculty member class, student member class, and board of directors (representing our supporting constituency, our "Third Member Class"). But Tietjen was unhappy with it. Not his style of leadership. For him and others Bob's collaborative model was just too cumbersome, and piece by piece it was dismantled.
4. The decision to "deploy" faculty after our 10 years of existence in St. Louis to Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (Berkeley CA) and the American Lutheran Church's mini-seminary in Austin, Texas. And, sadly, let students still fend for themselves. On the faculty side Bertram, Fuerbringer, Schroeder, Dave Krause all said "NO, let's keep the community together. It's still a time for confessing. This time in the upcoming ELCA, that's for sure. So let's take Seminex as a unit into the new ELCA, a different kind of seminary—in umpteen ways. A unique gift that's been given to us, and now we bring to the ELCA. And we'll continue to raise our own funds, etc. Won't cost Mother Church a nickel."

Other side said: "Let's go to these other seminaries where we already have friends—especially on HCM issues and other

“moderate” stuff—and besides they’ve invited us to come. Now is the time.”

The student member class voted by a big majority to keep the community together and take Seminex into the ELCA as a “different” sort of seminary, But four in the faculty member class is not a majority among some 40 folks. And the board didn’t think that was a good idea either. “Enrollment continues to decline, ditto for money; we’ll be dead before long if we don’t do something like this.” So two of the three member classes—faculty and board—said: Let’s go. After that it was “splained” again to the student member class, and by a modest majority they too said OK, let’s go. And so it happened.

Well, that’s the report from one who was a loser on all four of those issues. To hear the other side, talk to dear Seminex colleagues from those days (half of whom are still alive) who viewed each of these episodes through different lenses.

The Future of Lutheranism In a Global Context

Colleagues,

That topic is the title of the book review I’ve just done for *MISSIOLOGY*, the journal of the American Society of Missiology. The review editor muzzled me down to 500 words. You get much more.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

The Future of Lutheranism In a Global Context
Edited by Arland Jacobsen and James Aageson
Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress
2008. xi. 205 pp. Online price US\$19.00

The three “big” words in the title – Future, Lutheranism, Global – get in-depth analysis from only one of the 13 contributors to this volume of essays coming from a 2004 symposium sponsored by Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota. That author is Per Lønning, now an 81-year-old retired bishop and theology professor (and for 7 years member of parliament!) in Norway. Here’s what he says.

FUTURE: “Notwithstanding everything that can be called futurology, tomorrow is a time we do not know. Any research is a game, any result a guess.” (131) He offers this definition of futurology: “a science exploring things that will happen in case nothing happens; that is, nothing that disturbs preconceived expectations. The only resource for research into the future is the past.” (132) LUTHERANISM: “I suggest a question mark at the term Lutheranism. Isms . . . generally advertise a compact ideological system.” Does “the quality of being Lutheran” according to the Augsburg Confession result in such an “-ism”? He doesn’t think so. (136)

GLOBAL: “A warning light should be lit not primarily for the word GLOBAL but for any use of language that, at the foot of some emerging Tower of Babel, strives to remove boundaries! Such expansive terms frequently are used to present some expected or desired process in today’s world as inescapable and in need of no further exploration or justification. But if today’s expanding globalism, in all its extensions of meaning, cries for anything, it must be the question of clarification!”

(132)

In addition to checking on these three basic terms Lønning addresses what may be the most significant item for Lutheranism's future, yes, for the entire global church in the days ahead. "The frightening ecclesiological nightmare of tomorrow is . . . the threat of a gigantic left-right division crossing most denominational borders and old confessional identities." (137) It is the fight about the Bible, "division from the inside," he says.

"The problem is that both [sides] may be right, each to some extent and in certain regards, but critical analysis may be missing in both camps, and personal preferences—socio-cultural attachments, in particular—will decide. Such attitudes may reflect a general preference in a progressive-innovative or in a conservative-protective direction. In addition to that, every epoch exercises its particular pressure on and through public opinion—a fact to which global commercialization is giving increased momentum from year to year."(138)

Lønning's last two pages (142f.) bear this caption: "Scripture Alone! A Lutheran Principle? Yes . . . No . . . Yes!" Those two pages by themselves might be worth the price of the book.

So far Lønning. None of the other contributors give attention to Lønning's two waving index fingers about clarifying key terms or paying attention to the nightmare.

These authors—usually two each—come from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Middle East, Europe and North America. Many of their contributions are reportorial. They portray Lutheranism in their regions and muse about what the future may hold for Lutheran churches in their local contexts.

“Context” is an “in” word for many of the essays. And a particular vision of Lutheranism regularly accompanies such context-focused essays. That view of Lutheranism regularly gives an appreciative (or is it ritual?) nod to the Ur-heritage of the Lutheran Reformation, and then proposes—sometimes more aggressively, sometimes less—that Lutheranism’s agenda today needs to move beyond that late medieval context and the theological issues of that day to the very different world and the manifold new contexts where Lutheranism is at home today. That frequently then leads to proposals, beginning with the opening essay by the editors, to take “the traditional themes of Lutheran theology” and “incarnate the gospel in cultures very different from the West.” (p.2).

That term “incarnate”—and its Siamese twin “inculturate” (or “enculturate”)—return mantra-like throughout the book. But no proponents of that agenda stop to ask whether that agenda is even close to what the original Lutheran reformers thought they were doing in their own “late medieval context.” So readers are left ignorant should they ask: “If that was not Lutheranism’s original agenda—(this reviewer’s conviction)—why is it Lutheranism’s agenda today?”

Samples:

“The struggle to move beyond the missionary heritage and to enculturate Lutheranism in non-Western societies.” (5) “The 16th century Lutheran Reformation” was itself “an inculturation.” (14) In the pleas for such inculturation in Lutheranism’s future one author—a prof at the Moorhead college—has the chutzpah to propose changing the ancient Lutheran axiom “ecclesia semper reformanda” (the church always needs reforming) to “ecclesia semper inculturanda” (the church always needs inculturating).(18) That same author links the inculturation agenda with “a prophetic presence regarding

issues of social, economic and racial justice.”(20) And continuing on that prophetic path we hear social justice hyped over and over again, with the chapter culminating in doxology about “the gospel’s liberating power in situations of socio-economic injustice,” and an exhortation for commitment to a “global dialogue . . . regarding God’s liberating and healing work in the world.”

That is a view of both the Lutheran Reformation and the New Testament gospel which this reviewer finds off base. It is not hyperbole when I suggest that had Luther heard those lines, his first response would have been “Huh?”

Luther might even say something like this:

Inculturation, incarnation of the Gospel? That is the PROBLEM (not the SOLUTION) we face in the Holy Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Church today.

The gospel has become so incarnated into late medieval European culture, that it is not THE Gospel any longer. We never used the word culture much in our day, but here’s something to think about when you’re talking about human culture.

Human culture (in the now-fallen world) already has a “gospel,” an “other” Gospel (fundamentally a false one), incarnated within it. No human cultures ever show up gospel-free. The gospels they incarnate carry the same theological DNA as the people who create the cultures. Since that primordial crash in God’s once-upon-a-time clean creation—the REAL Big-Bang—this blemished DNA that bedevils every Old Adam/Old Eve comes along with the cultures they create. That happens willy-nilly. But why should that surprise anyone?

Like the flu virus, this blemished gospel mutates all the time,

but its fundamental DNA does not. It is always, as the Lutheran confessions claim, an “*opinio legis*.” Every culture incarnates the opinion that the culture-creators fear, love and trust this axiom: “law –yes, even God’s law, if you happen to be a theist–will save you.” Doing right will make everything right. Every culture brings with it this “other” gospel, this “other” soteriology. When asking how to heal life’s fundamental fractures, the chronic answer is: If you just do the right thing, everything will be fixed.

[Yes, I am putting words into Luther’s mouth. I wonder if he’d repeat them on his own. Having gone this far, I’ll continue.]

The Augsburg Aha! about the culture of 16th century Europe went something like this. Inculturating the Christian Gospel into a thousand years of European culture has led to THE Gospel’s demise. There’s always an other gospel already incarnate there when THE Gospel meets folks in a new culture. The attempt by our Holy Roman Empire and Holy Roman church to inculture the Gospel in our day has led to this result: the “other” gospel won.

Is there a better plan?

Luther’s Aha! (and Augsburg’s too) was NOT to lay out a program to inculturate the authentic Gospel into the Germanic culture of that day, to replace bad gospel with Good Gospel. Not at all. Instead it was to let that culture be what God made it to be, an “ethos under God’s law,” as Elert labels it. Don’t seek to gospel-ize it. In fact, step one is to de-gospelize the culture of the gospel that has infiltrated it, and not replace it with anything!

Next step: Instead of re-gospelizing culture with the authentic Gospel, the Augsburgers’ agenda was to keep cultures gospel-less. When facing the other gospel in their own culture, they sought to strip from that law-delineated culture its

“soteriological pretensions” (Bob Bertam’s bon mot). These pretensions do not come from God, the UR-culture-creator, but from the fractured human agents in that culture who mistakenly seek their salvation in it. Let God’s secular culture be secular. Secular, said the Augsburgers, means “no salvation here.” So don’t seek salvation there. De-incarnate from it the gospel that has sneaked into it.

Next step: Do your daily work—in all your “worldly” relationships—to preserve that secular culture. In nickel words: care for one another, seek justice and pursue it, keep your context “lawful” in warp and woof. Don’t try to “gospelize” your culture. That was the mistake both of the Roman church and of the left-wing Reformers in our own day. They thought they could create a Gospel-culture. The Word of God says no. God organizes human cultures to run on law. When you seek to mix in the good Gospel, you “join together what God has rendered asunder.” Granted, you can indeed try to do it, but the end product is always bad news—for both God’s good Gospel and God’s good law. It never fails. On both counts it’s lose, lose.

Summa: Not only does the Gospel refuse to incarnate itself into existing human cultures—can’t be done if the Gospel is to remain Gospel—but strictly speaking it also does not create its own culture, either. At least not yet. Not yet do we live in the culture of a new heaven and a new earth. What the real Gospel does create is a new ethos for all of us still living in our “old” native cultures. Christ’s “ . . . so send I you” is a mission back into our native cultures—that always run on law. “Be Easter people in your not-yet-Easter culture. Your agenda is NOT to redeem the culture, but to redeem the folks in it, yes, the folks imprisoned in it. Their rescue does not entail getting them out of that culture, but saving them from the false gospels that always surface in any culture, and tune them in to Christ’s new song. They’ll continue to march in their culture’s parade

with its law-dominant melody, but they'll be humming a different tune. You might even see a smile on their faces—surely there is one on yours—as y'all hum that Easter tune.”

Back to the book review

But that diversity, yes, that disagreement, throughout this volume about just what Lutheranism is—better said, what it originally WAS—reflects the reality of world Lutheranism today, as can be seen and heard when the Lutheran World Federation assembles its members for conferences and consultations. [ThTh reported on that earlier this year from the LWF consultation in Augsburg, Germany.]

From a Lutheran in the Middle East we hear “[The doctrine of] justification must go beyond the freed and forgiven individual. Justification today must go beyond eternal salvation.” But neither this voice, nor the other incarnators/enculturators in this volume address the original agenda, explicitly mandated in Christ’s mission commissions, namely, the forgiveness of sins (John 20:23, Luke 24:47). None of the “let’s-go-beyonders” bother to mention the task—the tough, tough task—of “Christum treiben,” promoting Christ’s forgiveness in their own local contexts. You might think it was already a done deal. Or if not yet finished, a piece of cake. So now Lutheranism “must go beyond.” The evidence for this is not offered. And it won’t be. There is none. Au contraire

There are a few voices—none of them North American—that say “no” to the inculturation agenda and its social justice focus as the calling of Lutherans today and on into the future. Explicit in rejecting this notion of Lutheranism, also citing where it comes from, is Pongsak Limthongviratn (native of Thailand).

“Through the influence of the West quite often the gospel is interpreted from a socio-political point of view that focuses on the impact of the gospel through love, justice and social service as favored by social gospel activists. . . . The role and status of Jesus the Christ is reduced to perfect human or Guru. Though these approaches are meaningful, they are not the proclamation of the gospel. If everything is proclamation of the gospel, then nothing is proclamation of the gospel.” (51f)

Other non-Western voices—Asian and African—tell us that the distinct theology of the Lutheran Reformation has not penetrated very deeply into the Lutheranism on their continents. “Africa has many trained pastors . . . but only a few are able to articulate what Lutheran theology in Africa is all about.” (32) “There is little evidence to suggest that Lutheran confessional theology has made a significant impact on Lutheran thinking in Asia. Lutheranism in Asia represents primarily a historical identity or a denominational label rather than a distinctive theological profile.” (71) No wonder the future of Lutheranism here is difficult to divine. Even so, Lutheran church membership in Africa is expanding exponentially in painful contrast to membership-atrophy in North America and Europe. Example (from the book’s extensive appendix of Lutheran numbers worldwide): There are now twice as many Lutherans in three countries of East Africa as there are in all of North America—16 million to (possibly) 8 million. One reason is that Lutherans in East Africa are convinced: If you are baptized, YOU are a missionary. That is a conviction nearly incomprehensible for Lutherans in the West.

Diversity and disagreement about just what Lutheranism is shows up in the contributions coming from Europe and North America as well.

A Lutheran seminary president in the USA tells us: "The Lutheran church is called to a missionary vocation [that] is different significantly from the vocation of Lutheranism at the time of the Reformation." (147) The central themes of Luther and the Lutheran confessions are listed, but we never learn why the "missionary vocation" central to those classic themes now calls Lutheranism to embark on a "significantly different" calling. [Then comes this word of comfort for the restless natives in the ELCA: "I can say with confidence that the Lutheran theological tradition is being faithfully transmitted from generation to generation at all eight seminaries of the ELCA." (150) I wonder what scholarly research documents that claim—"faithfully" transmitted, and at every one! Would that this were true.]

A bishop from Germany tells us that "the number of church members has steadily decreased . . . due to waves of exits in the early 1970s and after the fall of The Wall in 1989." (120) But we never hear what German Lutherans—the ones who stayed—learned from this exodus. The proposals reported for increasing Lutheranism's relevance to increasingly church-less Germans are offered modestly by the bishop, but to this reviewer they bypass the center.

It's all about regaining cultural relevance. Forgiveness of sins is not on the list. The Wittenberg Platzregen has moved elsewhere.

Amidst these mixed messages from Lutherans around the world, come Platzregen words from the Caribbean: "In [Lutheranism's] confessional writings . . . the central formulation of the Christian message—the gospel—is in terms of the forgiveness of sins." (82) When this writer then closes the chapter, he asks, "Whither Lutheranism in the Caribbean?" Yes, Lutheranism has had and will continue to have "minority status" in the Caribbean world. Even so, here is his call: "to be a community

in which no other identifier but faith in Jesus Christ constitutes Christian identity. The Lutheran articulation of the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ—in terms of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone calls for a radical rejection of any identifier that competes with this good news for primacy of place as the Christian message and the generative center of the Christian faith. No human factor is to be allowed to share in or add to this good news. Where that happens, the very gospel is at stake. Thus, justification by faith is both evangelical proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and a necessary hermeneutic to distinguish between the gospel and distortions of it.” (89)

World Lutheranism today is a mixed bag. Should you want prima facie evidence for that, read this book.

Life on the FasTrak. But Not the One You May Think of First.

Colleagues,

[Before we get to serious business, take a look at what Crossings webmaster Tom Law just put on our website: <https://crossings.org/logs/default.shtml> Did you notice? 2452 visitors came to the website EVERY DAY in September. That’s one visitor every 35.24 seconds around the clock day and night. On second thought, that IS serious business.]

Now to the serious business of Life on the FasTrak. Some background:

1. Everett R. Kalin's homily is today's theology for Thursday. Seminary classmate of mine (1950-55), then Seminex faculty colleague for a decade, Ev's last paying position before retirement (he turned 80 just a few days ago) was at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California. He is now "Christ Seminary-Seminex Professor of NT Emeritus" at that place. He taught NT at Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) starting in 1966 and at Seminex starting in 1974. When the Seminex faculty was deployed to three other Lutheran seminaries in 1983, he and three other Seminex professors (George Hoyer, Carl Graesser and Robert Smith) came to PLTS. [George is my brother-in-law. His 90th b.d. is in just a few days. Some of you might like to know.]
2. PLTS was founded on September 21, 1952, St. Matthew's Day. Every year when St. Matthew's day rolls around they celebrate Founders' Day on the Wednesday of that week. Since this year was Seminex's own 35th birthday, they planned and pulled off an integrated day. And, of course, there was worship. Ev did the proclaiming.
3. But one more introductory item is needed. Ev's two major metaphors for the sermon are piece-of-cake for every San Francisco Bay Area dweller, but not to folks elsewhere in the world—even folks like me east of the Sierras. He glombs on to terms from rush-hour-traffic on the expressways around the Bay: "FasTrak." and "VALID ETC." Completely arcane to me they were, so I asked Ev for some exegesis.

"FasTrak is the name for the automatic toll paying system out here, with a gizmo on our windshields, by means of which we don't need to stop to pay the \$4.00 for the bridges (Golden Gate

\$5.00). As you go through the tollbooth, on your left is an electronic sign, which flashes the wording VALID ETC. Ever since I saw it, I have been pondering what it might mean, and, more importantly, what I might make of it in a sermon or devotion.

“Now what does VALID ETC mean? VALID means that the gizmo on your windshield (and the super computer somewhere) says you are kosher for GO. But what about the ETC? Isn't that interesting,—at least to a quirky homilitizer who hunts for such things. When I used ETC for this sermon I wanted it to mean (and thought it did mean) et cetera. After preaching the sermon I Googled the phrase and found that it really means Valid Electronic Toll Collection. Not much preaching value there. So in the sermon it means what I say it means.”

With that data now in your own gizmo, you are VALID ETC for GO on Ev's FasTrak sermon.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

PLTS, Founders' Day and Seminex Celebration, September, 2009.

Lessons for Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist: Ezek 2:8-3:11, Eph 2:4-10, Psalm 119:33-40, Matt 9:9-13

Matt 9:9-13 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. 10And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. 11When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” 12But when he heard this, he

said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

"VALID, ETC."

So many topics; so many texts; so little time. I was tempted to add, "and miles to go before I sleep," but decided it was not a good idea to begin a sermon with the word "sleep"! So many topics: PLTS Founders' Day; Seminex at 35; the call of Matthew; and one more, which I'll save until the end. So many texts, from Ezekiel, Ephesians, Psalm 119 and Matthew. These I narrow to two, Matthew and Ephesians. The Psalm we sang, and Psalms are for singing. All I'll do with Ezekiel is make the rather perverse observation that in God's call to swallow the scroll we finally see the origin of the Collect for Holy Scripture, which invites us to read, mark, learn and INWARDLY DIGEST.

For all these topics, from these two texts, one double theme: a) God's grace/mercy/love that embraces us in Jesus Christ, the crucified one, and b) the grace/mercy/love we are therefore freed to live out in the world with this crucified one.

But still the embarrassment of riches. Today's texts from Matthew and Ephesians use all the terms I just used, grace/mercy/love, and more, to speak of both halves of the double theme, God's love for us and God's life through us. I want to make it simple, as Rabbi Marc Gellman was quoted as doing in an article called "The Right Way to Pray?" in last Wednesday's NY Times (printed, the article was 11 pages long). The Rabbi said, ". . . when you come right down to it, there are only four basic prayers. Gimme! Thanks! Oops! and Wow!"

I need, and have found, such a simple phrase that covers both God's love to us and God's love through us. I found it neither

in Matthew nor in Ephesians but in the words you see as you go through a tollbooth using FasTrak. A sign flashes these words: "VALID ETC." VALID ETC.?! Whatever the FasTrak people meant that to mean, in this sermon it means: a) because of God's love in the crucified one we are VALID, validated, justified, every day anew and b) every day anew the Spirit impels us to live the ETC. to which the gospel calls us.

Now the call of Matthew. Whatever this tax gatherer had done or been, with no prerequisites, he was called: FOLLOW ME. This was not, in first instance, a call to be one of the twelve apostles, but a call like ours, to be Jesus' follower, to follow his way to the cross, by which Matthew and we are validated. Matthew's gospel is by no means devoid of this VALID-half of our double equation: it tells us that Christ has come to give his life a ransom for many and that his blood is poured out for the forgiveness of sins. But Matthew majors in the ETC. In today's gospel, when Jesus is challenged about his and God's barrier-breaking inclusiveness, Jesus says, "Go and learn what it means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'" Jesus' followers are to be just as welcoming, as barrier-crossing, as merciful as he. "Go . . . and make disciples of all nations" is the command with which this gospel ends.

Ephesians 2 is much more articulate about the VALID part than Matthew: God is rich in mercy, acts out of great love, by grace, through faith, not the result of works. But the ETC. is not far behind-the "not of works" verse is followed by the assertion that in Christ Jesus we were created for good works. And if today's Ephesians lesson had not been cut at v. 10, we would have come to one of the most barrier-breaking, reconciling passages in the whole bible, in which through the cross, through his flesh, Jesus has broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile "that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace" (v. 15).

Sadly, as James Carroll shows in CONSTANTINE'S SWORD, the church often made the cross a weapon of warfare, of superiority. Whatever was not the church became no thing, especially if it was Jewish. The church, with its sword-cross, became the ecclesiastical equivalent of Chevy Chase's self-introduction on Saturday Night Live: "Hi, I'm Chevy Chase . . . and you're not!" Thank God for the cross that unites rather than divides, creating one new humanity!

Now the PLTS story. PLTS had two main catalysts, the Holy Spirit and James Prince Beasom. Beasom, President of the California Synod of the ULCA, was an incredibly energetic, mission-oriented pastor. Before there was a PLTS, Beasom went each year to the Lutheran seminaries in the East to recruit promising pastors for the West. He was so successful they said, "Don't come back." And so, he and others bought two mansions on a hill, and voila, a seminary in and for the West.

PLTS has had a wonderful blending of the VALID and the ETC., with an evangelical center and a reach beyond itself. Of PLTS's four orienting perspectives, Lutheran Identity seems to focus most specifically on the VALID, the evangelical core: it reads, "'A shared passion for the biblical story, centered on God's sheer love in Jesus Christ, which forms us as a community of worship, study and service, rooted in the Lutheran confessional tradition."

The other three perspectives, Religious Pluralism, Multiculturalism and Public Sphere, flow from this evangelical core into various aspects of the ETC. In today's gospel Jesus speaks of God's desire for mercy in the context of warning against saying no to those to whom God says yes. And so PLTS became a Reconciling in Christ seminary.

Its ecumenical and inter-religious setting in the GRADUATE

THEOLOGICAL UNION [GTU] is a logical extension of its Lutheran heritage, not a denial of it. So is PLTS's commitment to justice and peace. Maybe in the 60s it was accused of being the Berkeley city council at prayer. To which two brief remarks: 1. I learned in the Beasom booklet that the seminary is not actually in Berkeley, the property line putting it almost entirely in Contra Costa County. So, seminarians, if necessary, a quick note home to the family in Peoria or St. Cloud: "Guess what, Grandma, I am ACTUALLY NOT going to school in Berkeley!" 2. A passion for peace and justice did not first spring up at Sproul Plaza or on Telegraph Ave. It is at the heart of Jesus' message, and he, in turn, found it in the books he called scripture.

The Seminex story. In January of 1974, the Board of Control of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis suspended the seminary's president, John Tietjen, alleging that he was harboring false teachers on the faculty. The students declared a moratorium on classes until the issue was resolved, and the faculty majority (all but five of the 40-plus professors) honored the moratorium. A month later, with nothing resolved, the faculty was ordered to teach or be fired. The students and the faculty majority then voted to continue seminary education as Concordia Seminary in Exile (later called Christ Seminary-Seminex). On February 19, 1974 we processed off the campus to be met by Walter Brueggemann, then dean of Eden Seminary, and representatives of Jesuit-run St. Louis University, who gave us classrooms and took us in. In 1983, in anticipation of Lutheran merger, Seminex deployed its remaining faculty to other Lutheran seminaries, and four of us came here (Carl Graesser, Bob Smith, George Hoyer and I).

Here are the Seminex issues, in an abridged Gimme! Thanks! Oops! and Wow! version. On the issue of the VALID, both sides wanted to uphold the gospel. Our accusers sought to do that by insisting on a particular understanding of the scriptures. They

insisted we affirm, for example, “the historicity of every detail in the life of Jesus as recorded by the evangelists.” We found the gospel as the center of the scriptures by methods that differed from, and were not helped by, the ones they insisted on. On the issue of the ETC., here is one example. Our detractors declared, “a decision on . . . ordaining women . . . [cannot be] made on the basis of the ‘Gospel’ rather than on the teaching of Scripture as such.” On the ordination of women we found the gospel a wonderful guide to keep us from saying no where God was saying yes.

These are the stories of Matthew’s call, PLTS, and Seminex. There is one more story-by far the briefest of all, but, if John Steinbeck is right, the most important of all. In EAST OF EDEN he said, “If the story is not about the hearer, he/[she] will not listen.” This VALID and ETC. stuff is our story, yours and mine.

Last week my wife, Clara, and I rushed to the home of a neighbor to help the infirm husband, who had fallen. An hour later he fell again and 911 was called. As I sat with the wife, herself infirm, we spoke of their adult daughter, who lived at home with them and sacrificed her own life to meet their every need and then some. The mother said of the daughter, “She does not think she has done nearly enough and thus believes that when she dies she will not go to heaven, at least not right away.”

Thanks be to God there is a different way to think about deeds of love and God’s eternal embrace. The VALID, ETC. story is our story. From the baptismal get-go, because of Jesus Christ, we are VALID, validated in the sight of God. To these waters, this VALID, we are called back every day, only to be sent out on the FasTrak of the ETC., to show filial, parental, neighborly and every other kind of love. It does not get any better than that, and so, all I need to end is one of Rabbi Gellman’s prayers:

Wow! Amen.

Ev Kalin

In Washington, Missouri, Too – It's a Time for Confessing

Colleagues,

For over a decade Robin Morgan has regularly jumped in (when I'm somewhere else) to keep ThTh postings appearing. Summer 2008 she did four in a row when I was in absentia. Now and then she comes up with eminently postable stuff even when I'm not far away. And Robin is only an hour away from our place. She continues serving these days as pastor at Peace Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Washington, Missouri—right on the Mighty Missouri River—50 miles west of St. Louis. From what I know after now-and-then visits out there, Peace is a beacon of Good News in that town.

So it comes as no surprise that the congregation and pastor get recognized. Also by the Missouri Synod Lutheran pastors in the neighborhood who want it to be perfectly clear that they are NOT connected with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

There's an old joke we once-upon-a-time Missourians used to tell on ourselves, namely, this one:

When groups of Missouri Synod folks would move west with the pioneers into the expanding frontier years ago, and would come to unclaimed territory to settle down and homestead, they would regularly build two churches in their settlement. One to belong

to. One NOT to belong to.

It's happening still. In Robin's town last week a group of LCMS pastors published a letter-to-the-editor in the local newspaper—The Missourian—to make it perfectly clear that they were NOT connected with the ELCA. Pastor Robin's response, presented below along with the LCMS pastors' letter, has now appeared in this week's issue of the paper.

Here they are—documents of a time for confessing in Washington, Missouri.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

**“Don't Confuse Us With Them”
The Missourian
09/22/2009**

To The Editor:

Please don't confuse us with the “Lutherans” recently in the news: “Evangelical Lutherans' landmark shift – Vote lets gay men and lesbians in committed relationships serve as clergy” was the heading of New York Times story on Page one of the Aug. 22 St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Collectively, “Lutherans” are the largest Protestant denomination in the world. However, many are in name only. There are also numerous divisions or “synods” that can vary from being very liberal (both theologically and culturally) to being very “conservative,” i.e., holding to the Holy Scripture as the inerrant Word of God, the “confessional” standards of the historic Reformation (of the 1500s), and family values in light

of biblical teaching.

We are the LCMS (Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod), a 2.4-million-member church body with some 6,000-plus congregations throughout the United States of America and mission work in dozens of nations (not to be confused with or associated in any way with ELCA [Evangelical Lutheran Church of America], a membership of 4.8 million).

By God's grace, we, pastors in the Washington Circuit of the LCMS, still believe, confess and teach:

- The Holy Scripture is the true, inerrant Word of God in its entirety (II Timothy 3:16);
- The moral code of God's law is for all people, for all time, and this moral code is clearly expressed in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), by Jesus Christ (Matthew 5-7) and Christ's Apostles (Ephesians 5:3-21);
- Salvation from sin and eternal death is solely by God's grace through faith in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16, Acts 4:12, Ephesians 2:1-10);
- The sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman has God's design and blessings (Genesis 1, 2, John 2:1-11, Ephesians 5:21-33);
- The sanctity of human life (Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5, Luke 1:41-44);
- Sex outside of God's design of marriage is sinful, therefore harmful to both the individuals who practice such and to society at large (Leviticus 18:20-23, Romans 1:21-31, I Corinthians 6:9-20, I Timothy 1:10, Hebrews 13:4; Jude 7); and
- "The Great Commission" – in the power of the Holy Spirit, to share the "Good News" with all the world, to love the sinner and call everyone to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 24:46-49, I John 4, 5).

We are far from perfect. We are repentant sinners and rest in the comfort of God's sure forgiveness through the bloody sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the cross of Golgotha.

We pray for those who defend sin and justify its practices, that they may repent and no longer mock the atonement of Christ.

We pray for those who call themselves "Lutherans" but are so in name only, that they may truly follow the lead of Dr. Martin Luther (1483-1546), holding to the sacred Scriptures as the inerrant Word of God, remain steadfast to the historic Luther's Small Catechism and the Lutheran confessions, and refrain from "political correctness" and "secular moral relativism" shaping their theology and practice.

– Bill Zastrow, Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Port Hudson; Herman Otten, Trinity Lutheran Church, New Haven; Kevin M. Koester, Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, Belle and Zion Lutheran Church, Owensville; Aaron P. Kotila, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Rosebud; Lloyd E. Groenke, retired, Union; Dennis Schmelzer, Faith Lutheran Church, Washington; Timothy Brown, St. John's Lutheran Church, Beaufort; Mark Bangert, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Washington; Mark Goucher, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, New Haven; Norman Dierking, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Freedom; St. John Lutheran Church, Drake.

(c)Washington Missouri 2009

Response to Don't Confuse Us with Them

As pastor of Peace Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation across Hwy 47 from the Washington Middle School, I want to thank my Missouri Synod brothers in Christ for this opportunity to clarify our ministry in this community.

We believe that God, our Creator, sent Jesus into our broken world because He loves the world and longs to bring wholeness to all of His creation. God's mission in our world is two-fold. God calls all human beings to care for creation, not only Christians, but all people. God calls Christians, specifically, to share the Good News of Jesus with those who are longing for a more intimate relationship with God.

We are committed to telling everyone about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but we believe that our actions often speak louder than our words when individuals are deciding whether a congregation is the right community for them.

Peace is a Lutheran congregation that is significantly involved in keeping Franklin County a good place to live:

1. Members of Peace have built relationships with at-risk middle school students for the last two years by offering after school tutoring two days/week.
2. Members of Peace are presently offering English as a second language classes for Hispanic and Chinese immigrants in our community.
3. Members of Peace were founders and continue to be members of Neighbors United Undoing Racism which sponsors Washington's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebration.
4. Members of Peace have supplied resources for and worked side-by-side with our Missouri Synod brothers and sisters to build Habitat for Humanity houses in Beaufort, Sullivan and Leslie.

And most importantly, members of Peace welcome everyone to worship with us on Sunday morning. Everyone is welcome to be nourished by God's word and to partake of the Lord's meal at Peace. It doesn't matter who you are, what you're wearing or where you've come from.

Everyone is welcome at Peace.

Rev. Robin J. Morgan
Peace Lutheran Church
Washington, MO

The Next (or Next Next) Generation of Crossings Theologians

Colleagues,

Today's guest theologian, Marty Lessmann, age 25, has a distinction that I can't imagine how anyone would be able to match. For 90% of Marty's entire life he's been "Crossings-connected." Who can top that? Not me, and I'm occasionally labelled "co-founder." Marty's Crossings-connection started when he was two and one-half years old!

Here's how. Twenty-two and one-half years ago (90% of Marty's current age) Crossings quarterly newsletters, posted snail-mail, were our only vehicle for connecting the Crossings Community. The first one came out the year Marty was born. In those days the office was the spare room in the Schroeder house. Newsletters—eventually going to 4000-plus receivers—were stuffed at the dining room table. So four times a year—now and then five or six times a year—a bunch of local Crossings folks gathered around our dining room table—extended as far as it would go—to stuff newsletters into mailing envelopes. All this in those days before cyberspace was discovered. The first ones were done on a

typewriter, of course, and formatted with scissors and paste.

Cathy Lessmann, current major domo for all Crossings activities (yes, newsletters are now stuffed at HER dining room table), was herself "just" a new Crossings student, but one turned on. So she was regularly on hand for envelope stuffing at our place in those days. And what to do with her youngest child? Bring him along. So I taught Marty the arcane art of stuffing envelopes and we bonded. Marty was so small in those days that Marie remembers he would simply walk under the table to get to the other side instead of going around.

I just asked Marie to call him and get some updated info. Here's what he told her: "I teach math at Parkway Central High School in the St. Louis area. I coach girls' golf and boys' baseball. I lead the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, about 40 kids every other week. We have a dinner and then a Bible study, but beforehand I look over the FCA study guide and then change the questions to make them more law/gospel. FCS as an organization doesn't get it. It's law, law, law. I love Crossings. And I'm free! I hear so many kids saying they have to do this, they have to do that, because God says they have to. I tell them: no, you don't. In Christ we're free! No more *have to.*"

"I am a product of law/Gospel theology. A graduate of Colorado State University, I decided to go against my major (business) and go into the business of changing the hearts of young people. Why? I coached baseball, led a ministry, and worked at a christian youth camp throughout college. Eventually I had to ask myself what made my heart come alive, and that was being with youth; as a result I went into education . . . math being the easiest route for my certification. Now I teach high school students life and Gospel; math is my modus operandi. I'm an old man as well, as labeled by my peers, for I sing in a church choir and play in a bridge group."

When I stumbled on to Marty's letter to mega-church pastor Jim, I asked his permission to pass it on to you. He said yes. Here's Marty.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder.

Background:

Pastor Jim leads Flatirons Community Church out in Colorado; a non-denominational church of 9,000 weekend attendees. [Google the name to see what an operation it is.] I've got siblings out there, and when I visit them, I sometimes stop in at Flatirons. Recently Jim started a four-week sermon series about faith. His first sermon, entitled, "House of Cards" spoke about our faith in terms of what we put it in. He did an excellent job defining the external problem, that is suggesting faith is whatever we put belief in, and perhaps our faith is in the wrong place. Right into D2 he went, defining the internal problem as our faith being in the wrong place; our hearts cannot live on what we desire to put our faith into i.e., money, job, family, etc. Though he brushed on P4, he completely disregarded D3, the complete recognition of the problem with my unfaith and necessity for Christ. From D2 to P5 we went; "Just change your faith, trust the Cross, and you'll be alright..." and I agree, but it just doesn't work like that, for my unfaith, my disconnection with God the Judge, God the Mercy Manager, must be addressed. Whatever happened to "From 3 to 4 and not before?" [Ed here. Marty's citing the old Bertram mantra: Don't jump to step four in the Crossings sequence (Christ the Rescuer) until you have exposed the God-problem (step three) that only Christ can solve.]

So I decided to write a little note to Pastor Jim suggesting we

talk about what is so great about our faith:

Pastor Jim-Grace and Peace to you this fine afternoon...in St. Louis.

The power of the internet is amazing; I got to hear your sermon this afternoon and I'm 846 miles away from Flatirons. Thank you for taking the daunting task to speak about faith.

As you mentioned numerous times throughout your sermon, our faith is what we put our trust in. Our intelligence? Our humor? Our Job? Good Looks? As Christians we are the biggest culprits of placing our faith in the wrong place, for of all people we should know the best but yet fail in the end.

At one point you mentioned "If I put my faith in any other thing (other than the cross, that Great Exchange, God's son for my life, God's mercy for my iniquity) it is a house of cards and it will collapse." I agree, but find great trouble in that very message. For in the end even though I know my faith reconciles me, my unfaith scares me, I KNOW my faith will fail me. I KNOW I do not get it; I KNOW I need a savior. I personally cannot change my heart.

*In the end we must ask ourselves, "Self, what is so great about faith?" And if we are honest, I think you and I will both conclude that what is so great about our faith is NOT the fact that we have it, but *what is so great about our faith is the one who it is in.**

Jim, I'm an outsider in your church, heck I live in St. Louis and have only been blessed to worship with you all a couple times. I'm concerned, however, that your sermon on faith left me feeling worse about myself. My life is a deck of cards, for as much as I want to trust the message, I still trust my intelligence, humor, etc. I find no Good News in my faith for

as Christ reminds us, it is the size of a mustard seed. The Good News is trumped by the Bad News, that is, I know I don't always live with enough faith...complete faith.

But there my brother, is where Christ changes everything. What is so great about my mustard seed faith? The very fact that it is in Christ is all he needs. He takes what little faith I have and runs with it. For in the end, I know I am going to trust the house of cards. I don't want to, but it's my sin. Christ says, "Marty, I'm going to take your little faith, and make you well." To me that is the good news. I am made well, whole...ly (if you would) because of the one my little faith is in; not under my own doing.

I hear that same message in your sermons and I wanted to share what I think is so great about faith. Below I have included a link to an article written by Dr. Robert Bertram entitled, "What is So Great About Faith?" I believe you will find it invaluable to your series as you tackle the idea of faith. The contents have set me free in the Good News concerning faith, I hope you find the same.

<https://crossings.org/archive/bob/faithful-1974.shtml>

*Thank you for your time,
Marty*

P.S. There are a slew of articles on the crossings.org website about faith...many written by the same guy.

Jeremiah Wright was Right: God is NOT Blessing America

Colleagues,

Those two words hurled at the president of the United States in the “sacred” halls of the US Congress last week were a shot heard round the world.

But how are the talking heads seeing it? Mostly as a matter of etiquette. “You just don’t DO that to a US president from the floor of the US Capitol.” “Oh, yes, you can. That’s the way things are now.” Reprimand or not reprimand? Shallow, shallow, shallow. In Crossings lingo it’s a D-1, a first-level symptom that cries for deeper diagnosis. Don’t grab for a bandaid when you see that spot on your skin.

A friend of the accused explained it thus: “There was no filter between his brain and his mouth.” Funny. But not so funny when you think twice. The source of that symptom—only two words, only six letters!!!!—was his brain. The mindset generated the epithet. In terms of last Sunday’s Gospel for the day, that means the malady is theological. Mindsets in people’s heads are theological stuff. Peter’s mindset about Messiahs is “au contraire” the mindset God has about this Messiah named Jesus. [That was the D-2 diagnosis for Peter and the D-3 was Jesus’ word: “Satan’s gotcha” and you’re a goner.]

Mindsets and heart-sets are synonyms in Biblical vocabulary. “Out of the heart proceeds...” all that laundry list of the stuff that destroys. Antidote: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right mindset into my head.” And how are such hearts and mindsets created? Thought you’d never ask. Back to last Sunday’s Gospel for the answer. It takes the sort of

Messiah that God actually sent in order for that to happen.

Good News at the base for Peter is the Crucified Messiah who takes Peter's Satanic mindset with him into his Messianic death. Result: Peter's mindset will be put to death, but it won't be the end of Peter—as it otherwise will be if he keeps clinging to that mindset. What are the specs of Jesus' [and God's] mindset? Bob Bertram in teaching us this very text called it "Winning by Losing." Clearly au contraire to what everybody knows is the "right" mindset, the only sensible one: Winning by winning, by NOT losing. Not so, says Jesus here. If you refuse to be a loser, lose your life, you still lose. Where the Christ-mindset operates, you willingly lose your life [even actively give it away] and (what??!!!) you win, you "save it." And the primal place where that mindset went to work was in this Messiah himself.

Next level of Good News is for Peter is to hang his heart/mind on this Messiah and mime his mindset. And then (final level)—go back to his daily routines and "just do it." Bob's classic conclusion: Life is not "win/lose" Nor is it "win/win." It's always "lose/lose." But there are two different ways to lose. One is "lose, period!" The other is "lose, comma," and the sentence is not yet finished.

Back to those two words in Congress that night.

My grimmest—God-forbid!—thought has been: It's the shot across the bow for Civil War II in the USA. It came from South Carolina. That's where the volley came from that triggered America's Civil War of the 19th century. And in recent days (nights actually) when I can't get back to sleep at 3 a.m. more grisly grizzlies growl in my head. No necessary connections one with the other. Blips on my cerebral screen.

1. You have to be completely blind not to see that God is not

blessing America. Congress gridlocked. Trillion dollar wars not succeeding, which means failing. Healthcare reform stonewalled by capitalism. Capitalism itself in meltdown with only different bandaids [aka "regulations"] applied to assure us "recovery is now here."

2. Recovery is a medical term. You have to identify the disease inside that generates the symptoms. The medics call this etiology: how did this get started? You recover from a disease, not its symptoms. Symptom therapy has a bad track record.
3. Capitalism itself is the disease, not the cure, for this economy's meltdown. Even secular analysts (at least on NPR) are now saying that. As did Berthold Brecht in his "Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny" where Mahagonny is Manhattan. So I got up and checked this quick at Wikipedia. "Mahagonny as a city was intended to be a parable of capitalism stripped of its veneer of bourgeois respectability, as it 'arose to meet the needs and desires of the people, and it was these same needs and desires that brought about its destruction.' Ultimately, this was also intended as a commentary on the state of Weimar Germany; underneath that facade of prosperity and happiness, lay corruption and savagery. Under Brecht's view of capitalism, it is created to provide people the goods and services they need, but it does so at the expense of reducing everything to a mere commodity. Furthermore, since obtaining wealth in capitalism is a cutthroat enterprise, the powerful are no better than a gang of bandits, and the law in turn is run by such thugs."
4. Healthcare in the USA is a commodity. It's bought and sold. Reform won't happen by tinkering with the commodity system. When human health is a commodity, it will finally implode – and the humans with them. Our brand is so

entwined with capitalism that the latter's implosion will take it all away.

5. Like the cost of our current wars, healthcare reform is trillion-dollar talk. How much is a trillion? [When I was a grade school kid Dad had me on the tractor out in the field all summer long. Mathematically fascinated, I'd do calculations in my head. "If the corn rows I'm cultivating here are 38 inches apart, and the hills of corn in the row are also 38 inches apart, and there are three stalks in every hill, and every stalk will produce at least one ear of corn, how many ears will there be to pick in this 53 acre field in October?" The field, by the way, was a trapezoid. And then "If there are 20 rows of kernels on each ear of corn, and 40 kernels in each row on the ear?"] Now back to 2009. A trillion dollars? A single dollar bill is a smidgen over 6 inches long. So for two of them end-to-end, figure one foot. 10560 of them in a mile. OK, just figure 10K to make it easy. A trillion dollars laid end to end mak 100 million miles. That's from the earth to the sun and then 7 million miles beyond.
6. Capitalism is an -ism. Isms are alternate gospels. Nazism was. Stalinism was. Humanism too. Isms regularly come on as ways of salvation, guarantees of security. Fancy term: soteriology. The cornerstone of capitalism's soteriology is: Trust money; it can save you. Trust that more money is more salvation, more "security." In the NT the word for money is Mammon. Jesus himself says it's an either / or. You can serve God OR Mammon, but not both at the same time. And if you choose Mammon, that's "lose, period."
7. Is this Apocalypse Now? If not, what else?
8. An ancient ZIGGY cartoon. He's in a boat hardly bigger than himself. Raging sea, near total darkness. He cries: Why me? A thunderbolt answer appe ars in the stormy skies Why not?

9. Luther's translation of the Red Sea epic: "The LORD looked down upon the host of the Egyptians and sent terror in their midst. He knocked the wheels off their chariots and plunged them into chaos."
10. The wheels are coming off our chariots everywhere. Not just our military chariots. Not just in Asia.
11. The militants who pose the greatest threat to US survival are not in Afghanistan or Pakistan, but here in the USA, our fellow citizens who right now are shooting verbal volleys across our ship of state. Right out in the open. With no regret. Their number is legion. Many have guns. The number of guns too is legion. A powerful lobby (actually a third political party?) in the USA has them already outfitted. What catastrophe will ensue when the next volley is not two words, but one bullet?
12. Americans are no more immune to propaganda—falsehood presented as truth—than the Germans were in the 1930s. Also no more protected from following pied pipers into oblivion. And doing so with gusto—and guns too. Every nation, ours too, replicates the fallen world. Sometimes prayer brings these fully-awake nightmares to closure. Sometimes not. Even the prayers don't always stay on track.
13. God, preserve us here at the brink. Not because of our self-ascribed virtue (phony as you know it is), but because of your "kindness and forbearance and patience," as Paul proclaims (Rom. 2:4ff) even to those whom you had patently stopped blessing in his day. Three times Paul says "God gave them up" to their self-chosen self-destruction. He continues with words that are not more cheering, but still true—straight talk from the diagnosis doctor— "Do you not know that God's kindness (till now) is meant to lead you to repentance? [=the pointer toward real recovery] But by your hard and impenitent heart you are

storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will render to everyone according to his works." Move us, dear Lord, to genuine recovery. INJ.

Enough of my mental meanderings in pre-dawn darkness.

In conclusion. Pasted below is an item from America's first Republican president. It's been mentioned before in ThTh postings. Here's the full text. Not known as a church-goer, Lincoln was yet an uncanny theologian. Doubtless the best theologian-president America has ever had. And unabashedly so in the public arena. And the Senate was not far behind.

Even now, Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day

Washington, D.C. March 30, 1863[Senator James Harlan of Iowa, whose daughter later married President Lincoln's son Robert, introduced this Resolution in the Senate on March 2, 1863. The Resolution asked President Lincoln to proclaim a national day of prayer and fasting. The Resolution was adopted on March 3, and signed by Lincoln on March 30, one month before the fast day was observed.]

By the President of the United States of America.

A Proclamation.

Whereas, the Senate of the United States, devoutly recognizing the Supreme Authority and just Government of Almighty God, in all the affairs of men and of nations, has, by a resolution, requested the President to designate and set apart a day for National prayer and humiliation.

And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

And, insomuch as we know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30th. day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. And I do hereby request all the People to abstain, on

that day, from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.

All this being done, in sincerity and truth, let us then rest humbly in the hope authorized by the Divine teachings, that the united cry of the Nation will be heard on high, and answered with blessings, no less than the pardon of our national sins, and the restoration of our now divided and suffering Country, to its former happy condition of unity and peace.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this thirtieth day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty seventh.

*By the President: Abraham Lincoln
William H. Seward, Secretary of State.*

Those Ten Commandments – Conversation Continued

Colleagues,

First off, I did send last week's post to Pastor X. He responded, and then I did likewise. For now, that's inter nos.

The feedback from y'all on Pastor X's proposed sermon series on the decalogue has filled my inbasket. One was Jeff Anderson's "look what I found as a different translation for that Luther citation." I've already posted that to the listserve. Here are a couple more. Starting with a feisty one.

1. That announcement for the 10 Commandment Sermon Series should have been issued on either 1 April or Halloween. Laughter or horror are the only logical responses. [An Anglican priest in Canada with a Seminex M.Div. degree!]
2. Hi Ed, Here's how I'd "fix" Pastor X's blurb about preaching on the 10 commandments.

"Anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures." –Martin Luther, The Large Catechism

Even for Martin Luther, that's a very large claim. But I believe it is true. It helps to realize that Luther isn't referring to mere intellectual consent but rather to the total demand of the Law to life and how it is lived in community. In the commandments we find a God who addresses us where we live, where we face real issues about property, sex, and speech. To "know" these commandments is to know the total demand God through his Law makes of our lives as they are lived out in the world.

The commandments are guidelines for humanity in general. However, their function is not just to keep society running smoothly, but rather to reveal us as a people who are, in our daily lives, failing to meet the total demand that God makes through the Law. We have the Ten Commandments because, just like the ancient Israelites, we are in the bondage of slavery to, as Luther put it, "sin, death, and the devil." The commandments are a punitive list of "dos" and "don'ts" because they are a stern reminder of who we aren't and how we fail to be God's chosen people.

But this isn't why Luther could say to "know" the Ten Commandments is to know everything the Bible is about. This merely sets the stage. The Bible contains plenty of examples of our failures. We can look to each other and add to that list. Although knowing the Commandments means knowing that we are guilty as charged, this is not what's new in the Bible.

What's new in the Bible is God's final Word on the problem of our rebellion against Him. That final Word is one of mercy to sinners on behalf of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross bearing our sins and was raised from the dead by God. All of our failures to fulfill the Commandments are wiped clean by the body and blood of Christ, which is freely given to all. Renewed by Christ, the Commandments find their fulfillment in our new life trusting Christ.

Luther explains it best:

"When we have Christ, we will easily create new laws and judge everything correctly, even more, we will make new Decalogues". It is through Christ's death and resurrection alone and only that we are able to perfectly know the Commandments. This is why Luther could say to "know" the Ten Commandments is to know everything the Bible is about— it requires Christ's death and resurrection , and that Good News is everything the Bible is about.

Beginning Sunday, September 13, we will begin a new sermon series at both services exploring how Christ's death and resurrection heals our sins as revealed by the Ten Commandments and its implication for living the Christian life today. Jesus said that God's work for us is to believe in His Messiah (John 6:29). I invite you to join in worship, examining the life of discipleship viewed through the lens of Christ's death and resurrection.

Peter Keyel
St Louis, MO

Then these responses to Jeff Anderson's discovery of an alternate translation for Luther's "sticky wicket" sentence. Instead of "Anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures," Jeff found this alternative reading in the Triglotta, the old LCMS edition of the Lutheran Confessions: "For it needs must be that whoever knows the Ten Commandments perfectly must know all the Scriptures. . . ."

1. Yes, and yet if you read the larger context of the quote in question, you get the same sense from Luther. He's really deriding pastors who think they know the entire Scriptures. Either way, Pastor X missed the boat. [ELCA pastor in Illinois]
2. Hallelujah!! Amen!! [Lay theologian in Pennsylvania. She keeps holding my feet to the fire.]
3. Ed, Tiny extra note regarding that "Trigollata." Jary Pelikan told us that it would be ideal for our younger children to sit on to raise them at the table at mealtime. [Seminary classmate of mine from the 1950s. Retired LCMS pastor in NY]
4. Once again, I think both sides are making too much of this. I would agree that the Tappert and Kolb/Wengert translation can be misleading: one might think that the text of the Ten Commandments is all you need to understand Christian faith. (And this appeared to be how Pastor X misused this quote.) Though the old Dau/Bente [=Triglotta] and newer Concordia translation is therefore better, I would argue that both translations are in fact true (and the German and Latin can be translated either way). Let's read this in context: Luther is arguing against those who

say they know the Ten Commandments perfectly. They say they know them perfectly, well they must then know all of the Scriptures, and be able to advise, help, comfort, judge, decide every possible case in the entire world. Since they obviously don't know all this, Luther is calling them back to the study of the Ten Commandments, which are a summary of the Scriptures. Put the other way, Luther can say that the entire Bible is commentary on the Ten Commandments. So of course you can't understand the Ten Commandments without knowing the cross, without knowing God's will to be gracious to thousands. Likewise you cannot understand the cross without knowing God's commandments and punishments to the third and fourth generations.

The problem is not with mistranslation, but forgetting that the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments are also necessary. TOGETHER they give a brief summary of the Bible, of Christian faith, wisdom, and practice. [Ph.D. student at Univ. of Virginia]

5. Good find by alert reader Jeff Anderson! As I now have my dad's copy of the *Triglotta,* as well as *Tappert,* I can follow along. It's interesting to compare the English translation each provides of the German/Latin you quoted from the Triglotta.

Tappert: ***This much is certain: anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures. In all affairs and circumstances he can counsel, help, comfort, judge, and make decisions in both spiritual and temporal matters. He is qualified to sit in judgment upon all doctrines, estates, persons, laws, and everything else in the world.

Triglotta: ***For it needs must be that whoever knows the Ten Commandments perfectly must know all of Scriptures, so

that, in all affairs and cases, he can advise, help, comfort, judge, and decide both spiritual and temporal matters, and is qualified to sit in judgment upon all doctrines, estates, spirits, laws, and whatever else is in the world.

I can't help but wonder why the Tappert – and, apparently, the Kolb/Wengert – translations omit the second “must” of the sentence.

(Just thinking outloud here!) Could it have to do with different understandings/meanings of the word “must?” Example: A father takes his son into a bar for his 18th birthday. There is a sign on the door that says, “Must be 21 to enter!” The father says to his son as they walk in, “All right! You must be 21!”

Anyway, according to my Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary: *must* ...1 *a*. be commanded or requested to *b*: be urged to : ought to by all means 2 : *be compelled by physical necessity to : be required by immediate or future need or purpose to *3 a :*be obliged to: be compelled by social consideration to *b :* be required by law, custom, or moral conscience to *c*: be determined to *d :* be unreasonably or perversely compelled to *4* *be logically inferred or supposed to *5 : *be compelled by favor or by natural law to *6 : *was or were presumably certain to

Naturally, the father and his son are thrown out on their ears. The “must” of the sign was according to definition 1 a, while the father used it according to definition 4. (There is kernel of truth behind this story, by the way.)

Seems that Tappert sees fit to omit the “must” and so translates in the sense of definition 4: (“This much is

*certain: any idiot can see that anyone who knows the Ten Commandments – albeit perfect – already knows [i.e., ‘must’ know] the entire Scripture.”), while the Triglotta uses definition 1 a: (“You’d better believe that *in order to know* (or, *before you can know*) the Ten Commandments perfectly, you have to/are obliged to [‘must’] know all of Scripture.” Something like that.*

In other words, Tappert seems to be saying that it’s a foregone conclusion that to know the Ten Commandments is to know the entire Scriptures (though there is that pesky word “perfectly”), while the English of the Triglotta following the German and Latin says it’s a “command.” Is there any way at all that the German/Latin can be linguistically construed to say the former, whether as the sentence stands or in context of the entire paragraph or even preface? (I would doubt it.) Would love to hear the reasoning.

And then there’s that ‘so that’ in the Triglotta that is absent in the Tappert, which seems to put a different twist on the paragraph.

*Finally it’s interesting to note that it’s the *Catechism *(i.e., the whole ball of wax: 10Cs, Creed, Lord’s Prayer, Baptism, Sacrament of the Altar), and *not* the Ten Commandments alone “which is a compend and brief summary of all the Holy Scripture” – agreed to in both Tappert and Triglotta:*

*Tappert: What is the whole Psalter but meditations and exercises based on the *First Commandment?[*] Now, I know beyond a doubt that such lazy-bellies and presumptuous fellows do not understand a single Psalm, much less the entire Scriptures, yet they pretend to know and despise*

the Catechism, which is a brief compend and summary of all the Holy Scripture.

Triglotta: And what, indeed, is the entire Psalter but thoughts and exercises upon the First Commandment? Now I know of truth that such lazy paunches and presumptuous spirits do not understand a single psalm, much less the entire Scriptures; and yet they pretend to know and despise the Catechism, which is a compend and brief summary of all the Scriptures.

(And don't forget the little bit in there about the Psalter being "meditations and exercises based on the FIRST commandment, which opens up a whole discussion.)
Richard W. D. Jungkuntz

6. *(Thank you!) cubed. I was ready to turn in my union card and join the Bruderhof gang who insist that the Sermon on the Mount is the way that Xns must live until the eschaton happens. I knew that my problem was not with Luther but our interpretation of him. So good to learn that it was a translation error. How did such an event happen with our scholarship of the past 65 years? Once again it is the Gutenberg press – electronic – to our rescue. [Lutheran military chaplain in California]*

7. *Cool! We all should have seen that one coming.* A couple of years ago I started writing an article to be called "The Nine Commandments". It started with what the Lutheran Study Bible thankfully puts before us as a sidebar inserted at Exodus 20. It lays out the Jewish, the Roman Catholic/Lutheran, and the Reformed numbering of the commandments. The Jewish numbering of the "Ten Words"

(Decalogue) begins with first Gospel Word, God bringing the people out of slavery in Egypt. Then follow nine commandments. (I tell people there are only nine commandments, but before they get their hopes up, adultery is still in there.) The Jews have this one right. The commandments (all nine of those Words) make no sense without the first Word, the Good News Word about the greatest thing God had done for the chosen people up until that time. Speaking of timing, the Red Sea waters must have been still on their minds seeing as it happened only fifty days earlier by Jewish tradition, the original Pentecost festival. God gave no commands until the people were filled with Good News in their own recent history. Now THAT is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!
[ELCA pastor in Florida]

[For this one, a caveat from EHS. There is a quantum difference between the Good News of "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt," and the Good News of "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself—not counting trespasses." If the word "Gospel" means what the NT says it means, it cannot be used as it is in the sentence above "Decalogue begins with first Gospel Word, God bringing the people out of slavery in Egypt." That was indeed good news for the enslaved Israelites, but it wasn't Gospel. In Lutheran lingo, God did it with the left hand. Soteriology (right-handed stuff) it was not.

It was part one of God's legal (sic!) contract with Israel, clean contrary to God's earlier promise/faith covenant with Ur-patriarch Abraham. Part two was this: "You love me and keep my commandments, or else! And here are nine specifics for what I have in mind. You blow your part and you get visited." There was no rejoicing at Sinai

after these specs were laid out. Au contraire. The recorded first response: "If God keeps talking to us like this, we're dead meat." Gospel it was not.

Nowhere does any NT writer—and weren't they all Israelites?—ever link the word Gospel to Exodus/Sinai. That is a precedent to be followed. They must have known something. So did Jeremiah already way back then (31:34) as he specked out what was going to be "new" in God's new covenant. The new one would offer what was totally absent in the Sinai contract, namely, "forgiveness" for sinners, i.e., Gospel.

Exodus/Sinai was indeed a gift from God, but a gift that obligates. Gospel is also a gift from God, but a gift that liberates from those very unfulfilled obligations of the prior contract. Exodus/Sinai and Gospel are as different as day and night. Or, shall we say, law and promise. What God has not joined together, let us not do so either.]

In that Gospel,

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Preaching the Ten Commandments

Colleagues,

This time I'm asking you to write ThTh 586, namely, to compose a

response to this announcement just published in the parish newsletter by an ELCA pastor here in St. Louis. If your prose is not too incendiary, I'll send it on to the pastor. Seems to me that it's clear: he needs help. So does that congregation. The ELCA kerfuffle at the recent national assembly is minor compared to what's likely to be proclaimed as Christ's message to these parishioners. What help can you offer? To wit, something more in synch with Christ's

Peace and Joy.
Ed Schroeder

The Ten Commandments

"Anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures."

—Martin Luther, The Large Catechism

Even for Martin Luther, that's a very large claim. But I believe it is true. Everything depends on how one defines "to know." Luther isn't referring to mere intellectual consent but rather to a radical reordering of life and how it is lived in community. In the commandments we find a God who addresses us where we live, where we face real issues about property, sex, and speech. To "know" these commandments is to know God and his will for our lives as it is lived out in the world.

The commandments are not guidelines for humanity in general. They are a countercultural way of life for those who know who they are and to whom they belong. Their function is not to keep society running smoothly, but rather to produce a people who are, in our daily lives, a signal that God is at work in the world. We have the Ten Commandments because, just like the ancient Israelites, we have been set free from slavery to, as

Luther put it, "sin, death, and the devil." The commandments are not a punitive lists of "dos" and "don'ts" but a gracious reminder of who we are and who we ought to be as God's chosen people. That's why Luther could say to "know" the Ten Commandments is to know everything the Bible is about.

Beginning Sunday, September 13 we will begin a new sermon series at both services exploring the Ten Commandments and their implications for living the Christian life today. Jesus said to be his disciple one must keep God's commandments (John 14:21). I invite you to join us this September in worship as we examine the life of discipleship viewed through the lens of the Ten Commandments.

Peace, Pastor X

Dear Pastor X,

Greetings from a fellow preacher in the St. Louis area. Due, I suspect, to the will of the Holy Spirit, your recent parish newsletter article about a series of sermons based on the Ten Commandments has come to my attention (as well as the attention of others whose number is unknown to me). I beg your patience to receive some feedback from me on your proposal. In the interests of full disclosure, I am NOT a fellow pastor. I am a PMA (Parish Ministry Associate) certified to preach and lead worship within the Central States Synod, and have averaged once a month at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Poplar Bluff for all but a year and a half since October of 2001. I have also filled in elsewhere from time to time.

The Ten Commandments is, you have to admit, an interesting choice for a sermon series. I can tell from your article that you find it an interesting (dare I say challenging) choice

yourself. On the other hand, I can see why Luther's exhortation to preach the Ten Commandments is so compelling. It certainly was compelling to him.

When I studied the Lutheran Confessions under Professor Robert Bertram, I found Luther's explanation of the Ten Commandments difficult to deal with in a straightforward way. I can understand the desire to find a different way of hearing what he is saying, because when I heard it the first time, I wanted to thank brother Martin (sarcastically) for making me realize just how much I hate the Ten Commandments. And I don't want to hate the Ten Commandments. Did you fight the same impulse the first time you read it? Forgive me if I'm presuming too much, but are you still fighting that impulse today? I know I constantly fight it myself. I would suggest to you that this is the experience of all sinners. And yet, Brother Martin wants us to know the Ten Commandments – and I agree that mere intellectual consent is not the right meaning of “to know”.

Where I beg to differ with you is in your attempt to define what “to know” means: “a radical reordering of life and how it is lived in community.” That is a perfectly logical step to take. Indeed, it seems like that's what it must mean. After all, Brother Martin does such a decisive job of selling the goodness and holiness of the Ten Commandments, coming from the most divine of sources, God.

Indeed, in the conclusion of his explanation of the Ten Commandments, he describes them (from the Bente and Dau translation, CPH, 1921), as “a compend of divine doctrine, as to what we are to do in order that our whole life may be pleasing to God, and the true fountain and channel from and in which everything must arise and flow that is to be a good work, so that outside of the Ten Commandments no work or thing can be good or pleasing to God, however great or precious it be in the

eyes of the world.” Sure sounds like “a radical reordering of life and how it is lived in community” to me. Certainly, “to ‘know’ the commandments is to know God and his will for our lives as it is lived out in the world” as you say.

When you say, “The commandments are not guidelines for humanity in general. They are a countercultural way of life for those who know who they are and to whom they belong. Their function is not to keep society running smoothly, but rather to produce a people who are, in our daily lives, a signal that God is at work in the world” you begin to lose me. I feel tempted to make a distinction between the law God intends for the world and the law God intends for his believers, which contradicts my understanding that the laws of the world I live in are partly rooted in the Ten Commandments, as well as other ancient laws. Assuming I am not imagining things when I remember it that way, that also makes me question your assertion that “their function is not to keep society running smoothly.” Luther says the opposite. The world’s legal sanction against murder (derived from the commandment), for example, makes a positive contribution toward the goal of a smooth running society. That may not be their only function, but that is a function of the Ten Commandments.

When you say, “We have the Ten Commandments because, just like the ancient Israelites, we have been set free from slavery to, as Luther put it, ‘sin, death, and the devil.’” I find myself jumping off your bandwagon completely. At a bare minimum, one or more logical and very important steps have been left out of this reasoning. I refer you to the same conclusion I quoted from earlier: “And the miserable blind people” “who dare to invent a higher and better life and estate than the Ten Commandments” “do not see that no man can get so far as to keep one of the Ten Commandments as it should be kept, but both the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer must come to our aid (as we shall hear),

by which that [power and strength to keep the commandments] is sought and prayed for and received continually. Therefore all their boasting amounts to as much as if I boasted and said: To be sure, I have not a penny to make payment with, but I confidently undertake to pay ten florins.”

Not only that, I remember his explanation for the First Article of the Creed (which comes next in the Large Catechism) made me feel even more angry, ending as it does by enumerating to my exasperation every last duty I owe to my Creator – truly a burden too heavy for me to bear. To paraphrase my teacher, Doctor Bertram, every day I accumulate new debt: new blessings I am duty bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey God for. I’m still working on the debt I accumulated 30 years ago. Like spiraling credit card debt, it keeps multiplying and I keep getting deeper and deeper in debt. To say either by way of omission or by way of shorthand, “We have the Ten Commandments because, just like the ancient Israelites, we have been set free from slavery to, as Luther put it, ‘sin, death, and the devil.’” lays, with all due respect, a shallow foundation for a sermon worthy of the name Christian. And surely you do not mean to say that “the commandments are not a punitive list of ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts.’” All your parishioners have to do is actually read them for themselves and I would expect them to demand an explanation from you for how you can say that. A child of 7 knows they are a punitive list of “dos” and “don’ts”.

Fellow preacher of the Gospel of Christ, the Ten Commandments taken seriously are precisely part of the mechanism that enslaves us to, as Luther put it, “sin, death, and the devil.” Doesn’t Paul teach precisely this object lesson in his epistle to the Romans? When he says that prior to the law there was no sin, but when the law came in, sin multiplied in his life, is he not speaking the truth as you and your parishioners know it, deep down inside? From my experience I would assert to you that

this is absolutely the way the law works in my life as a sinner, and I sincerely doubt that I am unusual in that regard.

Furthermore, what sets us free from slavery to sin, death, and the devil, is expressed not in the Ten Commandments, but in the Creed, especially in the 2nd Article. Indeed, in Luther's explanation of the 2nd Article of the Creed, he spills the beans on what he's really doing in this Catechism of his: "For when we had been created by God the Father, and had received from Him all manner of good, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all evil, so that we fell under his wrath and displeasure and were doomed to eternal damnation, as we had merited and deserved. THERE WAS NO COUNSEL, HELP, OR COMFORT UNTIL THIS ONLY AND ETERNAL SON OF GOD IN HIS UNFATHOMABLE GOODNESS HAD COMPASSION UPON OUR MISERY AND WRETCHEDNESS, AND CAME FROM HEAVEN TO HELP US. THOSE TYRANTS AND JAILERS, THEN, ARE ALL EXPELLED NOW, AND IN THEIR PLACE HAS COME JESUS CHRIST, LORD OF LIFE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, EVERY BLESSING, AND SALVATION, AND HAS DELIVERED US POOR LOST MEN FROM THE JAWS OF HELL, HAS WON US, MADE US FREE, AND BROUGHT US AGAIN IN THE FAVOR AND GRACE OF THE FATHER, AND HAS TAKEN US AS HIS OWN PROPERTY UNDER HIS SHELTER AND PROTECTION, THAT HE MAY GOVERN US BY HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, WISDOM, POWER, LIFE, AND BLESSEDNESS."

By tyrants, I'm sure Luther means "sin, death, and the devil," but who or what does he mean by "jailers" if not the Law, and by extension, the Law's Author? Indeed I take him to mean that there was no counsel, help, or comfort, in, among other things, the Law!

I suspect we are entering the much traveled topic of The Third Use of the Law. From the above quote, "in their place" to me means that the Law is no longer useful to us once Christ has redeemed us. I don't see how you can escape that conclusion, especially as you take your inspiration from Martin Luther and

his Large Catechism.

Yet, your reference to John 14:21 must be taken seriously. What, then, did Jesus mean when he said we must keep his commandments (my NRSV doesn't say, "God's"; it says, "my")? That use of "my" is crucial here. Throughout John's Gospel, Moses and Christ are contrasted as different – beginning in the very first chapter (1:17). When Jesus here says "my" commandments, he is contrasting his commandments with those of Moses. You cannot get back to the Ten Commandments from John 14:21. Here Jesus is steering his disciples away from Moses' commandments to his own "new" ones.

So then, what do we have? Well, as Luther pointed out, we have our boast: I know your commandments and hold them dear (a sentiment expressed all throughout Psalm 119, among other Psalms). Then, beyond that, we have our redemption in Jesus Christ, who "keeps" the commandments in our stead and imputes his obedience to us for our justification.

Isn't THAT what should be the PROMINENT centerpiece of your sermon series? See, I think the Ten Commandments is a fine concept to address in a series of sermons. But! The Gospel of Jesus Christ – and I think the above quote from Luther (capitalized) rightly sets a very high standard for just what that Gospel is – is crucial to the entire sermon, regardless of the sermon's topical theme. In the back of my mind as I prepare a sermon is this thought: If Jesus Christ did NOT die on the cross and rise from the dead to win salvation and righteousness for me and all my brothers and sisters in the church, then I am wasting everybody's time. If he DID do all that – and for us – then I am wasting everybody's time if I fail to immerse my sermon in that singular Gospel, so that that Gospel, and only that Gospel, is what radiates from Golgotha into the very lives of those I am preaching to.

If I am one of your parishioners, and I read your announcement in your parish newsletter, I can easily be forgiven if I expect to hear absolutely nothing about the Cross of Jesus Christ in your sermons in this series. Maybe that's because I would be a visitor and don't know you as a preacher, so maybe the parts that I'm identifying as missing from your message are missing because they are already integral to the worship experience your parishioners have come to expect from you.

No, on second thought, even taking my not knowing you into account, I'm still left with this: your presentation of the Ten Commandments in your article doesn't simply leave stuff out, but it contradicts what seems to be left out.

Let me put it this way: Where is the Good News in your description of the upcoming sermon series? What Good News could I expect to hear in your sermons, beginning Sept. 13th, were I to visit your congregation? As best as I can read from your announcement, the Good News is that the Ten Commandments are not my enemy but my friend. The "dos and don'ts" that I see plainly in the text are somehow not negative, but positive, and that "keeping" them makes me a disciple of Jesus and signals that God has freed me from slavery to sin, death, and the devil. Since they are not guidelines, but a way of life, I sense that I'm not supposed to read them literally, but try to get behind them to "know" God, the giver of the commandments. I guess if the commandments are a gracious reminder of who I am and who I ought to be as part of God's chosen people, that means I am simply asked to do my best and let God do the rest.

I commune on a regular basis with others who believe that as well. I suspect it is a popular way of thinking of it. But it amounts to a false gospel. You see, at that point in the above thought process, I'd probably be thinking, "I don't believe this is Good News at all, because it doesn't connect with my life as

a sinner.” You see, the sinner in me absolutely loves hearing that the Ten Commandments aren’t punitive. The Old Adam in me dreads the Cross like the plague, and seeing no hint of it in your announcement, it pleads with me to sign on with you. Unfortunately, for the Old Adam in me, like Paul in Romans 7 I know myself way too well. I know that the sinner in me has only one good thing waiting for him: death through crucifixion with Christ. Anything else is too dangerous to contemplate. It certainly is not Good News.

I know that we all struggle with how to make our sermons relevant, vibrant, and captivating so that the people in the pews aren’t bored to tears by the same old formulaic mechanisms many of us grew up with many years ago (I am 51). I do not intend by any of this to minimize that part of the challenge. I find that to be a monumental challenge myself. I also am not suggesting anything formulaic in my assertion that the Gospel of Jesus Christ be front and center in a sermon. As far as I am concerned, we are called in freedom to express that Gospel in any form we find helpful for whatever context we are in. I find that each Gospel text in the lectionary has its own unique language for expressing the Gospel. Furthermore, we are called in freedom to express it in the language that touches the lives of the people we are preaching to. All of this means that the form of the sermon is completely up for grabs as long as the Holy Spirit can use – and not waste – the merits and benefits of Christ, and with these gifts from Christ touch the hearts of the people and comfort their troubled consciences (to use Melancthon’s favorite and very important yardstick for sermons from Apology IV).

The only thing that mystifies me when I hear fellow preachers talk about preaching is the notion that “preaching the Gospel” is the quickest way to put people to sleep, and that instead we should challenge the people, “make them think.” And that

invariably slides over into preaching law. There is no third option. The Lutheran Confessions propose a way to do both at the same time – preach the Good News AND get people thinking. That’s what you and I, as Lutheran preachers, are pledged to do every time we get into the pulpit. I pray that my words do not get in the way of the Holy Spirit’s message to you, and I pray that your ministry will always bear much fruit in the Holy Spirit of Christ.

Yours in Christ,
James Squire

The Crossings Method for Studying Biblical Texts

Colleagues,

At the annual meeting of the Crossings Board of Directors – now two weeks ago – I got an assignment. But before talking about that, listen to this more important news from that meeting.

LOOK WHO’S COMING TO THE CROSSINGS CONFERENCE NEXT TIME!

Three Significant Others – friends of Crossings but not (yet) insiders – want to join us at the upcoming Crossings Conference in January 2010, to talk shop with us about “God’s Promise – Our Mission.”

BILL BURROWS, major voice in Roman Catholic mission theology. A Roman Catholic? A Crossings conference? How so? In his presidential address at this year’s meeting of the American

Society of Missiology, Bill challenged the membership – from across the ecumenical spectrum: Roman Catholics, mainline protestants, evangelicals and pentecostals – to rally round this common ground: “Mission in Relation to the Gospel as Promise and the Forgiveness of Sin.” I got teary as I listened. For others, jaws dropped. You can see why the Crossings conference committee went after him to get him to talk with us. He said yes.

FRED DANKER, the world’s #1 New Testament lexicographer and life-long New Testament teacher, wants us to walk with him through the Gospel of Luke checking out Luke’s own mission theology. Heading for 90 on his next birthday, Fred’s still practicing his craft. His “concise” Greek-English lexicon (one-third the weight of his “big” one from the year 2000) is due any day from the University of Chicago Press. As I write this, he’s still in Europe having just attended the international meeting of NT scholars in Vienna where he garnered kudos for his decades of NT scholarship—and, of course, presented a paper.

ART SIMON, founder of Bread for the World, is coming to talk with us about his life’s work in “crossing” world hunger with God’s law and promise. ThTh 582, three weeks ago, was Karl Boehmke’s review of Art’s just-published book: THE RISING OF BREAD FOR THE WORLD. It’s a double autobiography, of Art Simon and of Bread for the World. If you need another teaser re-read that review on the Crossings website.

So register now, before it’s too late.

January 25-27, 2010, here in St. Louis.

Call the Crossings office @ 314-576-7357.

Or register on the Crossings Website <https://crossings.org/conference/default.shtml>

Yes, some of us goldie-oldies and new-crop younger folks are also on the conference program. But conversing with that trio of

superstars is once-in-a-lifetime. Spread the word around.

Now back to my assignment from the Crossings board of directors. Here's what they said:

"While you're still around, Ed, spell out for us once more the six steps of diagnosis and prognosis. Use nickel words." Before I send it to all of them, I'd like to field test it with all of you. Here's what I came up with. Does it make sense? Do you have any nickel words to suggest for places where I slipped in a ten-cent piece?

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

One way of teaching the Crossings six steps for Bible study.

Getting started.

It's not easy to read the Bible and get the message. That is true even though we now have the Bible in many easy-to-read English versions. Most difficult of all is to read the Bible and get its main message. That's the message from God that makes the difference between what the Bible calls Life and Death—both of those words with CAPITAL letters.

Many of the squabbles in the church today – and in the church of the past – have been about how to read the Bible and read it "right." The time in church history called the "Reformation" – now almost 500 years ago – was such a time. At the center of that squabble was this same debate: How to read the Bible and read it "right," so God's message intended for us gets through to us when we read it.

Those Reformers had an insight about why people often read the Bible “wrong.” None of us comes to the Bible neutral, they said (and this idea they got from the Bible itself). Right from the git-go we all come to the Bible with an “opinion” already stuck in our head. They called it the “legalist opinion.” We expect the Bible to tell us what to believe, how to behave, how to worship and pray – stuff we “ought” to do – because we have this idea in our heads that if and when we do the “right stuff, ” the stuff that God tells us to do, then we will be “right” people. That seems to make perfect sense. Do the right stuff and we will be OK with God and with ourselves.

But that “legalist opinion” is actually a barricade. It blocks us – right from the start – from hearing what God’s word really is saying in the Bible. Well then, if this is not what’s really in the Bible, what is? And how can we get away from that “legalist opinion”? For both questions the Reformers had specific answers. When you follow their lead as they answer the first question, you get help for the second question.

The Reformers of five hundred years ago (with Martin Luther as a major figure) urged the people of their day – and now us too many centuries later – to read the Bible in this way: Use the picture of a medical doctor when you think of God. Then think of the Bible as words from God the doctor. OK, words about what? Words that come from doctors are words that diagnose people’s sickness and then offer treatment to heal what’s wrong. The Bible presents God’s diagnosis, and then God’s treatment, for what’s wrong, what’s “sick,” with human beings – beginning with people of the past and finally also you and me. What you hear from your own medical doctor about your sickness and health is the same sort of thing you hear in the Bible. The only difference is that in the Bible it is God diagnosing what’s wrong with people (that’s us) and God offering healing for what ails the patients (us again).

Of course, with God-the-doctor the examination goes deeper than what happens when you visit your medical doctor. God's examination of us, his patients, goes all the way down to the bottom, to the roots of our problems. The Reformers learned from the Bible that the deepest "sickness" people have is a "God-problem." The God-problem is always at the root of all the other problems, ailments, "ouches" that people suffer. These problems, ailments, ouches actually grow from the root problem. They are symptoms, not the problem itself, but signals that there is such a problem farther down. It is easy to see that if you could heal that root problem, all the bad stuff that grows from that root, all those symptoms, would be healed too.

Because that problem is "deep" and way at the root, you have got to work your way down to get it out in the open. In the medical doctor's office, that's not always easy. Same is true in God's "doctor office." It takes work, but it's definitely worth doing. God's diagnosis in the Bible regularly follows a three-step pattern as it moves to find the root of the problem. Finding the root problem is good to know, but that doesn't heal it. So in the Bible, God-the-doctor doesn't stop there, but then becomes a really "good" doctor by offering help and healing at all three steps – from the root at the bottom all the way back up to the first level, the symptoms that we noticed when the Doctor's diagnosis began.

So there are three steps "down" in diagnosis and three steps "up" with healing.

When you start with this picture of the Bible as listening to your doctor, talking with your doctor, you can study any Bible story, any Bible text, using this six-step method (three down and three up). In our Crossings community we use this all the time for our Bible study. On our website we've been doing this for years with the different Bible readings that come every

Sunday in what's called the Revised Common Lectionary. This RSL gives specific Bible readings for Sunday worship throughout the church year. It is "common" in most of the Christian denominations in the English-speaking world.

Here's how it goes. Pick any one of those readings, or a favorite Bible story or text of your own (more than just one verse). Start with the three-step Diagnosis.

STEP ONE

Start by asking the question: What is the problem – right on the surface – that someone (or some group) has as you read this text?

In some Bible texts you may notice that more than one person (or group) "has a problem." So you may have to choose to focus on just one of the problem-people. When you do that, then stick with this problem-person all the way through the six steps. Stay on the case.

"First level" diagnosis focuses on people's behavior, the bad stuff people do to themselves or to each other, or even the bad situation they find themselves in. Level one diagnosis pinpoints what usually can be seen "from the outside," often in public view – bad stuff happening to someone, or bad stuff that someone is doing. You might call this level-one first step the "external" diagnosis. Something visible, even obvious, on the outside, regularly not hard to see. Maybe even quite easy to notice.

So for step one, write down what this first-level problem is according to this Bible text.

But, of course, such "external" problems always signal some "internal" problem, something deeper, lying beneath the surface. So we go back to the text and see what it offers for a deeper

diagnosis.

THAT IS STEP TWO,

asking the text what the deeper, inside, problem is. You might compare it to the X-ray machine in your doctor's office. The X-ray shows what's going on, what's wrong, on the inside. In Biblical language that's often what is going on in the "heart" or in the "mind." Step Two asks: What's going on inside folks that produces the bad stuff you identified at level one? What are these people fearing, loving or trusting that produces the "bad" fruit we saw in step one? What are the "sick" attitudes, ideas, prejudices, commitments in people's hearts down deep from which such stuff comes? In step two we are simply following Jesus's own diagnosis formula in Mark 7:21: "For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come" (and then comes a list of 13 such evil things coming from the heart and showing up on the outside!).

Write down what the Bible text's deeper X-ray identifies as the deeper internal problem.

STEP THREE

You may think that we could stop here with the diagnosis, but don't stop yet. God's own X-ray goes one step deeper. It probes to find the cause of this inner sickness of the heart. In Biblical language that is always the "sick" God-connection that lies even deeper beneath these "sick" human hearts and the "sick" stuff that then shows up on the outside. What is the God-problem underlying the two previous steps, the surface examination and the inner examination? What are these patients doing in their own God-connection, or God-DISconnection? And what is God doing to them as all this is going on? The God-problem arises at people's God-relationship. So there are two things to look for: what's happening in this relationship from our side and what's coming from God's side. Since this is

diagnosis of human sickness at the deepest level, what the X-ray will show is bad news from BOTH sides.

Sample: in the Garden of Eden story Adam and Eve's God-problem is that they have stopped listening only to God's voice in the Garden and are following this "other" voice that makes such tempting offers. In their hearts and minds they have stopped trusting God's message and have started to trust a message coming from some other messenger. That's what's going on at the human side at this deepest level. But something also comes from God's side in the relationship: "Get out of my Garden! No more Paradise for you!" If that's not a "God-problem," what is?

Step Three gets to the root problem, the most deadly aspect of the diagnosis. Since it is a God-problem, only God can fix it. One way to check if you have really gotten to this rock-bottom level is to ask: "Is this the sort of problem, the sort of sickness, that can only be solved, can only be healed, by God's own action?" Expressed in other words: "Can this mess only be healed by the Rescuer God sent, Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah?" If the answer to that question is "yes," then you have identified the "final" diagnosis. It goes no deeper than that.

It is important to set your diagnostic X-ray for this deepest level. For if you never get to this deepest level, this "God-problem" level, then the crucified and risen Jesus is not really necessary to "fix" what's wrong. He might be helpful as a counselor, an advisor, for Level One and Level Two problems, but human counselors, even a wise grandmother, can often do that. You don't "need" (=necessary) Jesus. When you stop the diagnosis at the second level (bad attitudes or bad things going on in the heart)—or even worse, just stop at that first level, the behavior level, as what needs to be fixed—then you have not yet identified a "God-problem." If you are not confronting a God-problem, then you don't need God's beloved Son, Jesus, God's own

“Good News” for healing whatever the problem is – even serious “problems of the heart.”

One piece of advice from the Reformation time was this: “Necessitate Christ.” Applied here it points to this: Keep asking the Biblical text for its own deepest X-ray, where Christ is “necessary”– and Christ alone can do it – to bring healing for the root sickness.

That sets you up for moving to the Good News in the Bible text. Here too as we look for God’s healing – starting from the bottom, this God-problem deepest X-ray – we proceed in three steps. We ask the text for healing, for Good News, at each of the three levels of “bad news” that we have just identified.

SO FOR STEP FOUR

we ask the text for the Good News it has to offer to bring healing to the STEP THREE God-problem that we have just uncovered. In different Bible texts that Good News will be expressed in a wide variety of words and word-pictures, images and metaphors, but they will always be pointing to Christ crucified and risen as their content. It is the core confession of the Christian faith that Christ, and Christ alone, is the healer whom God himself has offered–and offers us over and over again–to rescue humankind from the deep bad news of our God-problems.

[With texts from the Old Testament this takes extra work, for the simple reason that Jesus is not (yet) on the scene in any OT text. The Christmas event at Bethlehem doesn’t show up in the OT. Not until then is Jesus on the scene. So there will be no “explicit” Jesus material in those OT texts. What to do?

Here Christians follow the lead of New Testament writers, the very first Christians, when they draw on OT texts in their preaching and teaching. The rule is: In Jesus God is fulfilling

both the law and the promises he spoke in the OT to his ancient people. How to apply this rule for Bible study is an “advanced course,” you might say, after you learn the six-step sequence. It takes some practice. Anyone can learn it. The OT text studies on the Crossings website show how we use that rule with OT Bible material.]

In Step Four we scour the text for these Christ-signals, these pointers to Christ, to God’s own “final” solution to our “final” diagnosis. In any specific Bible text, there may not be enough verses present to put your finger on specific “Christ-content” terms. What to do? Answer: Look around at the context – the material coming before and after the verses in the text at hand. Blessed Bob Bertram often told us in such situations to “go to the neighbors and borrow a cup of sugar”– or whatever is needed – to get the one or two ingredients that may not be present in the particular text you are studying. But it is present in the full-scale diagnosis and treatment of the Biblical book that your text comes from. That applies not only to this first step of Good News – step four in the whole sequence – but the other steps as well, since any one Bible text (of just a few verses or many verses) may not have all six “ingredients” easily available in its pantry.

When you identify the Christ material that is “necessary” to heal the deep diagnosis of Step Three, check and see if you have “good-news” terms that connect with “bad-news” language. For example, if the deep diagnosis is “Lost to God” (as in lost sheep) then the good news is “Found by Christ, God’s own Good Shepherd.” There are many such paired terms for bad news/good news – at the deepest level – in the Bible. Besides lost and found, there are enslaved and free, alienated and reconciled, guilty and forgiven, dead and made alive, possessed by demons and redeemed by God, orphans and adopted children, enemies of God and friends of God, not OK and made OK—and many more. Try to

use the key terms presented by the Bible text you are studying for all six steps. The wide variety of words and images and metaphors is too good to let it go to waste. But remember, now and then you may have to “go to the neighbors to borrow”

Write down what the text offers for Step Four and then proceed to

STEP FIVE

If you do your diagnosis actually in three steps going down on a page of paper, you will now be going up. Our habit in the Crossings Community is to pattern these six steps as a big letter “U.” Three steps down on the left side of the U, then the big crossover to Christ, the Good News of Step Four. The Christ-words and terms are the stuff, the first building block, at the base of the right side of the U, and from this cornerstone we go upward on this side of the U for Steps Five and Six. When you actually place your written findings in these locations, you can check back and forth at each level to see if you have “enough” good news on the right side to cross over (and cross out!) the bad news on the left side. If not, go back to the text (or the context) to get some more ingredients to finish the job.

After you place the Good News for the deepest diagnosis (Step Four) right across the way from the bad news of Step Three, you then proceed to the space alongside your earlier Step Two. Here you will be asking the text for Good News to counter the Bad News you recorded in Step Two, bad news on the inside, in the human heart and human mind. You now ask the text: Do you have any Good News for the inside diagnosis we identified earlier? Any Good News, any healing to replace the sickness we pinpointed in the human heart and mind? All of this “good news” for the human heart arises from the healing at the root that Christ offers. So look for such connections in the text itself.

Once more you sometimes have to go to the neighbors for that ingredient, but don't do that until you have "squeezed" everything you can from the text you are studying. How are human hearts and minds changed when they get re-rooted in Christ as he was presented in Step Four at the deepest level? Here too you will look for "good news" terms that are the opposite of the "bad news" terms you found for second level diagnosis. If it was "hearts full of fear" there, then it might be "confidence" here, or "joy" or "courage" or "trusting Christ" or "following the Good Shepherd." All these new things, this new heart and mind, grow from that root, Christ crucified and risen, spelled out in Step Four. Write down what you find, and move to the final Step Six.

STEP SIX.

Christ is God's own gift of healing for the God-problem. Christ is then the root for the internal healing of hearts and minds. That's Steps Four and Five. Now Step Six takes us back to the "outside" where we began with our original diagnosis, back out into the world where people live and work and interact – and where the bad stuff was going on that we started with in Step One. But now we have new people, with new hearts and minds – all coming from their new (good and new, as in Good News) Christ-connection.

So we ask the text one more time for signals of what these healed people look like in daily life, what their new behaviors are. How are they different from what they were when we started the diagnosis? If that difference isn't yet made clear, or is just beginning, how might they be living "good news" lives (instead of their previous "bad news" lives) now that they have new hearts and minds? To use a technical medical term that goes along with diagnosis, what is the new "prognosis" for people rooted in Christ and nourished by his mercy and forgiveness?

What new futures await folks who have their hearts now “hanging” on Christ (as Luther liked to say)? Hanging your heart, Luther said, is what faith is all about. Any faith is a matter of where you hang your heart. Christians hang their hearts on Christ. That’s what the word Christian means.

A simple sample of the six steps, the first-ever published six-stepper, was Bob Bertram’s doing it on the Christmas story from Luke 2. [For details on this GO to <https://crossings.org/archive/bob/default.shtml> and click on “A Christmas Crossing.”] First question: Who has the problem in this text? Bob took the shepherds. How did he then work out the diagnosis? Like this:

SEPT ONE “By night”

External diagnosis. Doing their routine work but “in the dark.” Sure, here it actually was after the sun had gone down, but in Luke and throughout the Bible “darkness” often points to “deep darkness.” It’s a diagnosis word for people living their lives “in the dark” even when the sun is shining.

STEP TWO “Fear”
Internal diagnosis. When the heavenly fireworks happen – brilliant light, heavenly messengers, all that noise – the shepherds are “sore afraid.” The actual Greek text says: they feared a “mega” fear. For Hebrew people this heavenly hoopla was judgment day stuff. And would these shepherds pass this “final examination”? Their mega fear in the heart gives their answer.

STEP THREE “Lost”

For the God-problem level Bob Bertram “goes to the neighbor to borrow something.” The first two diagnostic terms – night and fear – are in this Christmas text, but the word “lost” is not. It is, however, Luke’s favorite word for the God-problem, and he uses it often in other places in his Gospel. For example

Luke 15 with three parables about getting lost as the deep God-problem. So Bob borrows from Luke 15. The connection is that if the shepherds are about to fail the “final exam” of judgment day, what are they? Lost. Lost to God. Lost period. Big Losers. A God-problem that needs (necessitates) a God-given solution.

STEP FOUR “Savior”

Good News to trump the deep bad news of Step Three. The good news term for losers is “Savior.” Which is exactly what the heavenly messengers announce to the mega-fearful shepherds: “A Savior who is Christ the Lord” to rescue them (us too) from the final judgment day, and from any other judgment days that come before that last one in your life. And where to find him? “In the city of David [=an Old Testament rescue signal] . . . in a manger wrapped in swaddling cloths.” All signals pointing forward to Good Friday and then Easter’s triumph.

STEP FIVE “Joy”

“Good tidings of great joy.” In Greek that “great” is also the “mega” word. Note the big switch in the human heart. Mega joy replaces mega fear.

STEP SIX “Glorifying and Praising”

Back out in the world where our diagnosis began. But no longer “in the dark.” The shepherds en-lightened, as you can see/hear from their actions. At the very end of the text the shepherds are glorifying and praising God, the very things the angels were doing during the opening judgment day drama. The simple meaning of the word angel is messenger. The shepherds take over the angels’ job. They are now the messengers for the Savior and for the Joy replacing Fear. They are no longer “in the dark” about God and themselves, about the world. Note how the pairs (bad news and good news) fit together: Lost and Savior; Fear and Joy; Shrouded in Darkness and Glorifying & Praising.

Epilogue. Want to see how this six-step method works out with actual Bible texts? Go to the Crossings website <https://crossings.org> and click on "Text Study." There you will have hundreds of examples from the many years that Crossings people have been using the six-step sequence to get to the message of the Bible.

One more item. Way back at the beginning of this essay I referred to the "legalist opinion" as a blockade for hearing what God the doctor wants people to hear in the Bible. The legalist opinion thinks that God will be "nice" to us only if we perform according to God's rules and regulations. But that opinion is itself our problem. It's a Second Level affliction in the heart and mind. But it's even worse than that. It points to a Level Three affliction that necessitates Christ for the answer.

Like this: if God were to relate to us only on the basis of our performance – doing the right things – we'd be losers on the very first day, even the first hour. Take just the first commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all the time." Who among us has kept that commandment for even one whole day? So we're all first commandment-breakers right from the start – before you even look at the other nine. That's a God-problem diagnosis. The prognosis for commandment-breakers is not good news: "You shall surely die." So trying to find out "what we ought to be doing" when we read the Bible is not the "right" way to read the Bible.

Much better is to be listening to THE Doctor's diagnosis and the treatment he offers: And that treatment, that new prognosis for our deep sickness, is always a surprise.

Yes, we all fail to follow the "you ought to" commandments. But, but . . . then comes the big surprise. In the crucified and

risen Jesus, God's special agent (that's what "Christ" means), God makes an offer, a promise, of mercy and forgiveness to commandment-breakers. Hooked to Christ, commandment-breakers – including breakers of the first BIG commandment – get a new prognosis. Life instead of death, joy replacing fear, freedom in place of slavery as we live our lives out in the world. Such a deal! The six-step method for studying the Bible is designed to get this Good News out of the Bible, into our lives, and out into the world.

Edward H. Schroeder
St. Louis, Missouri
August 2009

Crossings Inc. Annual Board Meeting – My Report

Colleagues,

Last week the Crossings board of directors held their annual meeting here in St. Louis. As a goldie-oldie I get invited and this year attended for a few hours. I do have to give my report for what I've been doing in the past twelve months with my piece of the pie, these ThTh postings. [I have no vote. It's all honorific. No honorarium. By my choice.]

You may have wondered who these "strange and wonderful" board members are. Here's the current list.

- Steven Kuhl, President, East Troy, WI
- Cathy Lessmann, Secretary, Office Manager, Chesterfield,

MO

- Steven Albertin, Zionsville, IN
- Jerome Burce, Lakewood, OH
- Carol Braun, Jersey City, NJ
- Lori Cornell, Federal Way, WA
- Marcus Felde, Indianapolis, IN
- Michael Hoy, Decatur, IL
- Don Tanner, St. Louis, MO
- Tom Law, Webmaster. Marion, IA

Here follows my report at last week's gathering.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Crossings Community, Inc. Annual Board Meeting, August 12-13, 2009. Thursday Theology report.

Deep background. The first ever "Sabbatheology" was posted to a very short list of folks by EHS on Jan. 27, 1996. [That was a Saturday, hence the strange name that I still pronounce as though there were two "th's" there, even though only one shows up in the spelling. Hence: "Sabbath-theology."] Before long—though not in the first few posts—it became a weekly 6-step text study in the Crossings paradigm, sent out on Saturdays, a 6-step study of one of the pericopes in the Revised Standard Lectionary for the Sunday coming 8 days later. Sabbatheology #88 went out on Nov. 15, 1997, whereupon Robin Morgan and Mike Hoy took over the series beginning with Advent I in the Year of Luke. After recovery from heart surgery early in 1998, EHS—longing to do something on the internet again—fashioned an essay on something or other and sent it out to the listserve. It was May 14, 1998, a Thursday. Therefore Thursday Theology #1. The rest is history. This week's ThTh post is #583.

Since last year's board meeting 52 issues of Thursday Theology have appeared. In addition I have posted six "in-betweeners," documents I received from various sources that interested me enough to prompt me to send them on to the listserve readership under an "FYI" rubric.

Of the 52 issues of ThTh posted this past year, 27 came from my own hand and 25 were offered by guest writers I solicited.

The guest Thursday Theologians were:

- Jeffrey Anderson
- Karl Boehmke
- Ken Dobson (2)
- Jukka Kaariainen
- Peter Keyel
- Phil Kuehnert (2)
- Steve Kuhl
- Steve Krueger (3)
- Sherman Lee
- William Moorhead
- Robin Morgan (4)
- Armencius Munthe +
- Ron Neustadt
- Fred Niedner (3)
- Richard Parsons
- Chris Repp

At last count, Crossings Internet postings—Sabbatheology and Thursday Theology—go to a listserve of 669 receivers. These posts are then archived on the Crossings website www.crossings.org

Crossings webmaster Tom Law regularly updates the logs telling us about the traffic that comes to our website. The logs are available for anyone to see

@ <https://crossings.org/logs/default.shtml>. Updated at the end of June 2009 the logs indicate that ThTh gets 10% of the traffic among the 2000-plus folks who visit our website each day. So that is 200 more ThTh-readers each day, 1400 per week. Even if all the listserve folks who receive ThTh automatically do not read it, the ThTh readership is somewhere in the neighborhood of 2K per week.

When you go to the logs, you first see Tom's chart of "The Most Important Stats." When you click on the underlined year (2009) on that chart, you get more info than I know what to do with. But do GO there once and then scroll down to "Domain Report." Take a look at that orange-colored segment of the circle and Tom's figures below that tell you what it is. Among the many interesting—even strange—data from Tom's logs is this particular orange pie-slice. It says that five percent—one out of twenty—of these 2000 visitors per day come from Russia! That's 100 every day!

Can that be true? And if it is, what does that mean? Is there an unknown "Armencius" hustling Crossings in Russia? Is Putin spying on us? How to find out more about this large audience — concerning whom, from whom, we've never heard a word? There is also a large number of Aussie computers coming to our site, according to Tom's statistics. What's that all about? If/when I post this report as a ThTh offering, perhaps a voice from Vladivostok and/or one from Downunder will give us a clue.

Respectfully submitted,
Edward H. Schroeder
August 12, 2009