

# How my Mind has Changed? Well, Maybe.

Colleagues,

At the Seminex birthday party a few weeks ago – reported last month in ThTh #578 <https://crossings.org/thursday/2009/thur070909.shtml> – five of us goldie-oldie profs showed up on a panel. Some had prepared their words on paper; I and one other just ad libbed. A glitch in the recording system failed to preserve the words of us ad-libbers for posterity. So we were asked to reconstruct what we said. Here's what I think I said. Well, maybe.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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When Ed Krentz asked me to be on this panel, he told me the focus was “How my mind has changed.” I told him: “Ed, you know that mine hasn’t.” “Yes,” he said, “we all know that. But we’ll listen to you nevertheless. Ten minutes.”

When folks talk about “how my mind has changed,” they usually refer to something about which they once said “No” and now they say “Yes.” Or vice versa. I don’t have any such “no” to “yes” to talk about on the “big stuff” we wrestled with in those great days. Not even any “yes, buts.”

Instead, it’s “Yes (again) to all of that, and yes to even more that I wasn’t aware of which follows from that first Yes.”

The big additional “yes” for me since those days is mission. I didn’t realize how important Bill Danker was to our Seminex

enterprise. The first ever trained missiologist in the LCMS. Doctor's degree from Heidelberg, Germany with major missiologist Gensichen as his Doktervater. His drumbeat for mission was the next step that follows all our hyping of "confession"—confession of the Gospel, "pure" and unadulterated by add-ons of any kind—during those glorious days of our own "Time for Confessing," as Bob Bertram's posthumous book tells of it. But I didn't see it then.

Once at Seminex during a Kaffeeklatsch in the commons, Bill tried to 'splain it to me. But I was a slow learner. Now I know better. Here's the sequence. [It sounds a bit snazzier when you use the Latin words, because they all rhyme. But even if you're a Luddite about Latin, it's easy to make it English.]

Start with the cornerstone axiom of the Augsburg Confession and Apology.

1. The Gospel is a promise. PROMISSIO in Latin.
2. PROMISSIO calls for CONFESSIO. The promissio—on its own—urges that it be confessed, in the literal meaning of the NT Greek term for confessing, homologeoo, homo-logia. That equals "say the same thing." Appropriate that promise for yourself and, first of all, say it back to God. "You say I'm your forgiven sinner? And your Beloved Son verifies that on Good Friday and Easter? Well, then I'll say the same thing too; I am your beloved kid. I'm hanging my heart on that promise which came my way from your Beloved Son."
3. After which comes MISSIO, the ongoing mission of the gospel. It's a piece of cake. "Same-say" that promise to others still stuck with their hearts hanging on other promises, "other Gospels." Not just in foreign lands where "other religions" reign, but right here at home where "other Gospels" are being hustled everywhere—and scads of

folks are trusting them. You want to pass it on.

But I didn't see the missio-connection back then and I think many of the rest of us didn't either. Yet there were signals. For example, an essay in the "Law-Gospel Reductionist Reader" that our systematics department inflicted on Seminex students. That essay was originally a lecture—long before Seminex—that Bob Bertram had given for one of Bill Danker's mission conferences. Bob's mantra was: "The secret of missio is promissio." I'd read it many times and nodded in agreement. But it wasn't till later that the "Aha!" happened.

So far as I know there is one ELCA seminary that has taken this triad – promissio, confessio, missio – and made it the official mission statement of its whole enterprise. That's Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. But why should that surprise us? Look at who three of the senior profs are at that place—Bliese, Keifert, Simpson—all Seminex alums. All three sitting in this audience. That's one place where Seminex theology is alive and well these days—35 years later.

A major place, better, THE major place, where Seminex theology is operative today is shown in those numbers Ralph Klein just told us about: Seminex grads as rostered pastors. In ELCA 372. In LCMS 110. What we've all been hearing from such folks at this get-together is solid testimony of that. And those 110 in the Missouri Synod! That was a surprise for me. I knew a number of "our folks" were major movers in the DayStar crowd of promissio-confessors in the LCMS, but I didn't know the total number was so large. And, of course, there are those five (or is it six?) ELCA bishops who are Seminex alums.

Another place where Seminex Theology is at home is in the Crossings Community. Already back in Seminex days Bob Bertram got this outfit going, one of the many "sidebars" he concocted. Early on he dragged me into the venture. I'm still Crossings-

connected. And I know that many of you are too. But this is not self-advertising. Well, not “just” that. It’s reportorial. What the Crossings Community hustles is Seminex theology—promissio, confessio, missio. That is the Crossings cornerstone.

Now in the era of cyberspace it’s on the Internet and WWW where Crossings builds on that cornerstone. And that means an international audience for the two major items posted each week: text studies on lectionary pericopes and a Thursday Theology essay. They go to a listserve (700 addresses) and then wind up archived on the website [www.crossings.org]. Pastors – and laity too – in Singapore, Indonesia, South Africa, Ethiopia, Argentina, Australia, Japan and elsewhere are working with “Seminex theology” in their ministries. Promissio, confessio, missio is what they’re up to. The Crossings web site gets over 2000 hits per day. Fifteen hundred pages of stuff is downloaded per day from the site. We don’t know WHO they are. We know only their computer addresses and WHERE they come from. At last count it was over 100 countries.

Well, maybe my mind HAS changed. I was not always a happy camper during those Seminex years in St. Louis. Some of you may remember that Bob Bertram had formulated another mantra for our confessing movement back then. He talked about “winning by losing.” That mixed metaphor left me frequently curmudgeonly—as many of you in this audience remember. But now I’m more cheerful. Yes, you skeptics, more cheerful. That’s my confessio. More cheerful, not only because of all the good stuff mentioned in the paragraphs above. Good News indeed! But this mantra too is clearer to me now. Winning by losing is the Promissio—you get to Easter via Good Friday. But Easter at the end. Good News indeed. And that Easter-Promissio calls for Confessio which leads to Missio. Nudging four-score years in age, I keep telling myself that—and now you dear ones too: Count it all joy!

June 24, 2009

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# **A Double Autobiography—Art Simon and Bread for the World**

Colleagues,

Long-retired Lutheran pastor Karl Boehmke (he just turned ninety) is the irrepressible activist for Bread for the World in our local congregation here in St. Louis. So it was a no-brainer in deciding who should review Art Simon's retrospective on his own life and the life of Bread for the World, which sprang from his heart and head now 35 years ago.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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**Review: THE RISING OF BREAD FOR THE WORLD:**

**The Outcry of Citizens Against Hunger.**

**Arthur Simon,. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009, Paper. 168 pp.**

**[\$11.53 @ Amazon]**

My guess is that you who read this will already be well acquainted with BFW and much of the work it has accomplished. This remarkable organization, now 35 years old, has provided a challenge to Christian people who feel for the poor in our land and the many impoverished brothers and sisters of the world. Let me begin with the changes in my own thinking and experience over

the years and then tie in to Art Simon's story.

At the close of World War II, many areas of Europe lay in rubble. People were literally starving to death. Church leaders in the U.S. said, we cannot let our brothers and sisters starve, send food. So we sent food. At our little mission church in Washington, DC, every Sunday we packed an 11-pound box (postal limit then) with flour, powdered milk and other life-sustaining foods. Our particular boxes were directed to orphans in Paris, France, whom a tiny Lutheran congregation had gathered in from the streets to keep from starving to death.

Some church leaders at once saw the picture in larger scope, and said, we must work together to get more than 11 pounds to those in dire straits. Lutheran World Relief was founded, as one of a hundred such church relief agencies. Now we could send shiploads of grain and other commodities to people in extreme hunger. The grain was governmental surplus in the United States (to keep market prices under control); relief agencies were asked to pay the shipping costs. I remember saying, one dollar will deliver 580 pounds of food to our fellow beings who are hungry. All Christian church bodies had programs with similar objectives. I served on the LCMS Board of World Relief, which together with the other U.S. Lutheran bodies, constituted Lutheran World Relief. There had been a shift in our thinking and acting.

Then I recall Werner Kuntz of the Board of World Relief saying (this was the early 1960s), if the people of a village in India can be supplied with shovels to dig a village well, they could grow food which we are now sending them from half way around the world. The concept of Development was catching hold: teach a man to fish – or farm or market or whatever – and you have fed him for life. This concept of development has continued to catch on among the developed nations of the world, with a number of refinements. First, teaching one man to fish is not enough, it

takes a village, literally, to sustain economic development. Second, what about the women, who in many underdeveloped places are the ones who must feed their children, send them to school and keep them healthy? Microfinance has entered the picture: lend a woman \$50 or \$100 and she will be able to start her own business to support her family and contribute to the village – you will have fed her family for life. Sustainability has become the key. Much of this transitional thinking I was gaining from reading studies of Bread for the World – and here I am way ahead of the story! So, let me now go to Art Simon's book.

One critical ingredient was missing in all this – a connection between the efforts of the churches and the responsibility of government first to see that its own people are fed and then that the poor of the world are helped. Many Christians felt this lack of connection but also felt helpless to do anything about it. It would take someone called by God to understand and live within the problem, then with courage to address the problem, and finally with determination to rally church leaders, public officials and citizens to a new cause. *THE RISING OF BREAD FOR THE WORLD: The Outcry of Citizens Against Hunger*, is the story of the man, the call and the rallying that has taken place across 35 and more years. It is a thrilling story for those who, with Jesus, have a heart for the poor and eyes to see the heavenly kingdom in the rising of a loaf of bread.

Art Simon tells his own life story – tells it with modesty and candor. He asks no credit for his vision or leadership, but rather gives credit by name and accomplishment to the many others who became involved – I am impressed! He never dreamed of founding BFW, still the events of his life led him to the day when he mailed a mimeographed 2-page letter to friends, asking them: “Do you think we could start a movement to persuade our public officials to devote more of our resources to the poor and hungry?”

Begin at the very beginning: Brother Paul Simon (eventually to become senator from Illinois) and Art were born to Martin and Ruth Simon, missionaries to China, repatriated to the U.S. during rising tensions along the Yangtze. Martin became editor of THE CHRISTIAN PARENT magazine for Concordia Publishing House. Paul, the older brother, went into journalism, and soon was editing a newspaper in Troy, IL., near St. Louis. Art considered following his brother into journalism, but then felt drawn toward pastoral ministry. He studied at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, during which years he helped Paul in the nitty-gritty details of running for public offices in Illinois. This experience of the workings of the political world, as Paul continued up the political ladder, would prove invaluable.

Art started teaching at Concordia Teachers College, Chicago, then became pastor in Denver, CO. When a call came from Trinity Lutheran Church, New York City, it took but the challenge of a Brooklyn colleague, "Nobody wants to come to New York's Lower East Side," to convince Art that here was exactly where he needed to be. So he spent the developing years of his ministry among the poor of the tenements of New York's Lower East Side. Here he saw hunger day by day at first hand, in its cruelest forms, and did what he could to help as many as he could. He worked hand-in-hand with Christian leaders of other faiths who were doing exactly the same. Together they worked with community organizations who fought for better living conditions. When they tried to redevelop several blocks of tenements to improve housing circumstances, they learned how difficult it is to move political powers and processes.

Art began publishing books to make the plight of the poor visible to those whose way of life missed seeing it – BREAKING BREAD WITH THE HUNGRY and FACES OF POVERTY. Then, together with brother Paul, THE POLITICS OF WORLD HUNGER. He took part in the civil rights marches in Washington, DC, and Selma, AL.



Art came to this conclusion: "People construct their own picture of reality based on what they experience and want to believe. Widespread hunger and poverty are not part of that reality. Even when confronted with hungry people and conditions of poverty, Americans on the whole simply cannot believe or imagine the suffering because they seldom see it; when they do, it is a threat to their comfort, so they choose not to think about it. Blocking poor people from our minds, however, may be a passive way of wishing they did not exist. . . ."

More and more he was being struck with the thought: "Christians need to be challenged to weigh in as citizens to help shape decisions of government that have huge bearing on hungry people."

That was when his 2-page mimeographed letter went out to church leaders who might be interested in launching a movement to do just that. Response was mixed. It was principally the encouragement of Richard John Neuhaus, a neighboring pastor and proponent of Christian faith in the public square, that convinced him to go for it.

The project would be Christian and ecumenical from the word go. Art touched base with prominent leaders in all religious groups, Protestant Mainline, Evangelicals, Roman Catholics. Some gave their support, others were wary. Especially helpful was Eugene Carson Blake, retired General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. The going was never easy and the future of the movement never assured. The constituting articles would read:

*"As Christians we affirm the right to food: the right of every man, woman and child on earth to a nutritionally adequate diet. This right is grounded in the value God places on human life and in the belief that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."*

Those who joined the BFW movement would write letters to their congressional representatives, urging them to make the feeding of the hungry not an afterthought, but an upfront policy of our nation. Each year one proposal would be put forth as the theme to be promoted. The themes changed as the times changed and the Cold War moved on toward its end. Always there was competition with military spending for dollars available; help for the poor can easily be cut, but dollars for war cannot.

BFW itself was never conceived of as a relief agency; it is a policy-influencing movement, working with and on behalf of a host of relief agencies. It seeks to educate people as to the existence and extent of poverty, and to make the reduction of poverty an integral part of our national priorities – poverty here in the United States and poverty abroad, especially lands bearing the scars of earlier exploitation by occupying powers.

There have been successes and there have been setbacks. One notable success was the Jubilee Debt Campaign of the year 2000. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund had been lending funds to developing nations to encourage their economies, but the interest payments on these loans became such a burden that any economic gain was never reaching the poor. BFW helped promote the biblical idea of Jubilee – cancellation of debts. Citizens responded to the call with enthusiasm and Congress passed resolutions making the cancellation possible. Children could now go to school, live in better houses, have food every day and health care when needed. There have been other such notable successes.

One notable setback: The end of the Cold War seemed to finally present opportunity for directing the vast sums spent on military matters toward the elimination of poverty. The Harvest of Peace resolution would have done that, but Iraq's subsequent incursion into Kuwait changed all that, and despite BFW's heroic

campaigning, the Harvest Forgive Peace resolution never reached the floor of Congress. John Howard Yoder reminded BFW seminars that what God requires of us is not success but faithfulness.

In 1991, Simon decided to retire from BFW. David Beckman, Seminex graduate, an economist from the World Bank, had the talents and experience needed to carry on the work. This he has done, and the picture continues to change. By the turn of the millennium, the number of hungry in the world had been reduced from 1.2 billion to 800 million. Since then, war and recession have pushed the number back up to the 1.2 billion mark – it is always the poor who bear the brunt of adversity.

Simon continues to write.

*“I have long contended that Christians will become voices for the hungry if two conditions are met: first, they must be convinced that doing so is an important, God-pleasing way of loving others; second, they must see what a difference it makes for them. On both counts the case is becoming increasingly clear and is persuading a growing number of people.”*

My thoughts: You will enjoy the first half of the book for its personal reflections and its introduction to church leaders of other denominations who have dreamed and worked as we have. The heart of the story is in the second half with its candid assessments of how hard it is to move both citizens and public officials to put our resources to work for the poor. My thinking has been challenged. Yours may be, too.

A. Karl Boehmke

Clayton, MO

July 2009

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# **“The Unlimited Mercy of God” – Armencius Munthe, R.I.P.**

Another memento mori. Three in a row for us in 8 days. Just two weeks ago (ThTh #579) Armencius was our reporter for “Platzregen on the move in Indonesia.” I passed on to you his words that cheered our community: “On July 7 here in Sumatra I was asked to present a Bible Study for a conference of 500 Methodists. I did diagnosis/prognosis with Philippians 2. Many were amazed at what they heard.”

After that euphoria came now this “Remember!” from his son Paul, like his father, a Lutheran pastor:

*Dear beloved brothers and sisters, Today, Saturday July 25, 2009 at 21.30 our Lord Jesus Christ has called our father, Armencius Munthe, back to His peaceful Kingdom. He passed away after he has suffered some heart attacks and stroke since Saturday last week. The funeral service will be held on Tuesday 28 July 2009 in Medan. We thank you for your prayers and for your lovely help and support in his ministry. We kindly ask you to continue pray for us especially for our mother. In His love.*

*Paul Munthe*

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Armencius has been dear to Marie and me since our first meeting back in 1986 at an LWF gathering in Strassbourg. We learned that he too was an “Old Hamburger,” having done his grad work with the same theological faculty at the University of Hamburg

(Germany) that had earlier be-doctored me. We intersected with him and his family during two of our mission volunteer gigs (1999 & 2004) in Indonesia. I did a “Crossings” demonstration for the faculty and student body at “his” seminary. He asked me to contribute something for his “Festschrift” publication when he turned 70. Which I did. Armencius was a presenter on the program for our Crossings Conference last year here in town. When you do pray for “our mother,” as son Paul requests, her name is Floriana.

For today’s ThTh here’s Armencius’ own telling of his life story. He sent it to me when he was 72. I’m glad I held on to it. You will be too.

Weeping with them that weep—but not without hope.  
Ed Schroeder

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## **The Rev. DR. ARMENCIUS MUNTHE**

“The Unlimited Mercy of God” Medan, 2004

### **CHILDHOOD**

#### **Separated from Parents**

I was born on February 12, 1934 – on Monday – in the village of Pangambatan, in Karo District. It is a small village located in the tourism area of Sipiso-Piso Waterfall – a beautiful tourism spot in Northern Sumatra. Aek Bolon, a small river that flows through the village, is the source of water for the famous waterfall. This village is located at the border of Simalungun and Karo District. Although this place is in the administration area of the Karo Districts Government, most of the Pangambatan villagers are from Simalungun tribe. Simalungun is the commonly spoken language and most of the villagers – who are mostly

farmers – can also speak the languages of Karo and Tapanuli.

My father was Djalias Munthe, and my mother, Honim Girsang. I am the eldest of six children (five sons and one daughter). According to my mother, when I was one year old my grandfather (my father's father) took me from Pangambatan to his village in Lingga Tonga in Dairi District. The reason was because he needed a companion at home. I was reared by him until I was seven years old. When it was time for me to attend school, I returned to my parents' house in Pangambatan.

### Father Died and I Stayed Six Months in a Refuge

I completed the Elementary School (SR) until the third grade because in our village the school was provided only up to the third grade. Then I moved to Seribudolok which was about 10 miles away to continue on to fourth grade. Some friends and I had to stay with relatives. We brought our supplies from our village and cooked for ourselves. For the first year I stayed with an older cousin, Mora Saragih, who was still single at that time.

We would visit home once every six months to replenish our supplies. The first time we went home, my friends didn't want to go back to school anymore. I was tempted not to go back, I stayed three days longer than I should. My father was curious, but I lied by telling him that we still had three more days off from school. My father understood. But when I still didn't want to go back to Seribudolok until the third day, he became very angry. He took a broom and said he would hit me if I didn't want to go to school anymore. He was very different from my friends' fathers who didn't care whether their children went back to school or not. This scared me, so I changed my mind and decided to return to school. (Not until later in my life did I thank my father for his insistence. If he had not been so strong, I would

probably be a farmer still living in that village like my other friends).

The second Aggression with the Dutch in 1947 brought us much sorrow. My father was shot to death by the colonialists. He was the head of the village and a major sergeant in the Civil Army. This unfortunate incidence started when the villagers started a fire to burn the village. To help the situation, my father went around and called out to the villagers not to burn their own villages. It was November 27, 1947. My father was on his way to call out people who were in their hiding places when he was caught by the Dutch. They killed him. Since the situation was not safe yet, he was buried in the field in a hurry with no casket or any funeral ceremony. Meanwhile, the Pangambatan villagers were ready to take refuge. My family went to Lingga Tonga, in Pakpak Dairi. We walked on foot for two days through the Sibuatan mountains. We stayed in Lingga Tonga for six months.

When the situation was safe again, we returned to Pangambatan. The district government of Karo moved my father's tomb to a special cemetery near our village. I then became like my friends who had quit school earlier, working in the field.

There was a time when I felt the desire to go back to school again. When I told my mother about it, she agreed. The reason I thought I wanted to go back to school was my weak physical condition preventing me working physically. Before long I was encouraged to go back to school since I was no longer expected to help in the field.

I became very motivated to study after those few years out of school. I stayed with Teacher Dj. Petrus Purba (later became Pastor Dj. Petrus Purba). He used to be a teacher in our village before he moved to Seribudolok after the refuge. There were

about 15 students from Pangambatan and Purba Saribu who stayed at his house. We listened to his sermons every night. Finally I “marguru tardidi” (Baptism class) and received my baptism and confirmation at the church, Huria Batak Kristen Protestan (the Protestant Church of Batak) in Seribudolok on June 11, 1950. My mother didn’t know I was baptized. Otherwise she would have prepared a big meal for the occasion. I recall after the church service my friends and I went for a walk on the main road – Sutomo road today. At that time, all of my family hadn’t been baptized and still believed in pelbegu religion (heathen).

I graduated from the Elementary School in 1950. It took me eight years to complete instead of the usual six years. This was because of the aggression, the death of my father and living in a refuge.

## **TO THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL**

### **No Hindrance for God’s Plan**

After graduating from elementary school, I registered at a Junior High School, SMP 1, in Pematangsiantar and graduated in 1953. During my SMP, I liked to read “Immanuel” – the monthly magazine of HKBP (Batak Lutheran Church). I learned about the Good News, the Church and the Theol. School from that magazine.

After my graduation from SMP, I read an advertisement in the magazine about the registration for new students in Sipoholon Seminary. I submitted my application and reported to Pastor A. Wilmar (who was the General Secretary of HKBP-Simalungun at that time) only to be told that the allocation from the HKBPS was only for two people and they were already decided, Umbersius H. Simbayak and Gustaf Saragih. When I left the office I met Gustaf Saragih who mentioned that he was not interested in going to the Seminary.

With a little hope, I returned to the General Secretary’s office



and reported that Gustaf didn't want to go to Sipoholon Seminary although he was already registered as a candidate. The Secretary did not seem to believe me and asked to send for Gustaf. I was then asked to bring a letter to Gustaf. When I met him, he insisted on not going to the Seminary. It was his family who later came and reported formally that Gustaf was more interested to go to a School of Forestry.

That was my chance to study at the Seminary, replacing Gustaf. I went home to Pangambatan and told my mother about it . A Theological School was a strange thing for my family since they were not Christians yet.

(Considering our family's finances, I had never thought of continuing my study until college, much less of ever studying in Germany. I also enjoyed traveling to several countries, as well as being one of the Church Leader of GKPS.)

Some of our relatives even looked down and accused me of being insolent. "Na so mambotoh dirini do ambia on, bapana pe lang adong be, lao homa hu sikola pandita. Lang anggo ibuat sikkola na martulahe" ("This person is being insolent, his father has died. Why doesn't he just attend a school that would grant him a scholarship?"), they said. There was a scholarship or "tulahe" if you entered into the High Teacher School (SGA) at that time. My mother was the only person who told me "Goodbye" when I left for Sipoholon.

I left for Sipoholon on September 27, 1953 even though the school already started on September 15, so I was late. Before leaving, I talked to my uncle, Iskander Simanjorang, a son of my great aunt. He was the one who always encouraged me to enter Theological School. He himself had continued his study to the Junior Teacher School (SGB) in Pematangsiantar and received a scholarship. "I will contribute some of my scholarship to you

only if your study goes well," he said. His words really encouraged me.

(He kept his promises and sent me some money for two months. God's blessings came later and I received my scholarship from the Seminary in my second year. What I learned was, even if our good intention for others seems small, it could encourage them to move forward).

The night before I left, my uncle offered to conduct a service for me. He preached from Ephesians 3:20. (...Him -God- who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine)

I left for Sipoholon on a horse-drawn carriage from Sirongit market, near Tarutung carrying a suitcase and other supplies. Riding on a horse carriage was a luxurious thing at that time. I was met by my friend, Umbersius H. Sumbayak who was already there in Sipoholon and also was welcomed warmly by a professor, Ds. F. Siregar, who spoke Simalungun fluently because he once taught at the Pastoral School in Pematang Raya. I was so happy to meet them.

When I started to study, I realized I had missed some of the lessons. Some friends helped by giving me their notes so I could catch up. (Sipoholon Seminary was an institution that managed several education fields. One of them was a Secondary Theology School which required a five-year study. The graduates would be Junior Theology Bachelors who could be ordained as pastors. That was the school I attended).

I studied in Sipoholon for just one year. In 1954, the Secondary Theological School moved to Pematangsiantar because the University of HKBP Nommensen had just opened and consisted of a Faculty of Theology.

The professors at the Faculty of Theology were mostly Germans

and Indonesians who graduated from German universities. There were also some from the USA, India and Norway. Their culture had changed our way of studying and discipline. Besides, I was encouraged to study hard. I graduated from the Secondary Theological School in 1958.

To be a Pastor: For Money?

I was ordained as a HKBPS pastor on June 15, 1958 and started to work as a Junior Pastor in a parish in HKBPS (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan Simalungun) Medan. I only worked the job for two months because the council of Theological Faculty's professors had asked the Leaders of HKBPS to send me to continue my study at the Nommensen Faculty of Theology in Pematangsiantar in order for me to get my full Bachelor degree. The Church Leaders agreed through an Executive meeting.

This new assignment shocked me. I intended to decline by meeting Pastor J. Wismar Saragih, the Vice Ephorus of HKBPS in Pematangsiantar. I planned for my strategy and argument to decline the assignment on the way to his house. My main reason was our family financial situation. My father had died, my mother was just a farmer and my younger siblings still needed financial help.

When I met the pastor at his home, I tried hard to persuade him not to ask me to continue my study. While I was speaking, he allowed me to give my arguments until I had no more word left to say. After that he prayed. Finally I got his advice. He sent me to the door and reminded me that continuing my study was for the progress of Simalungun. Later I admired him as a person who had encouraged me. I owed him.

After completing my study in 1961, the Church Leader of HKBPS appointed me as a Parish Pastor in Saribudolok HKBPS. I enjoyed the job and started to mingle with the congregation.

Unfortunately, I was there only for six months because the Church Leader of HKBPS asked me to continue my study in Germany, as recommended by the Council of the Theological Faculty's Professors of Nommensen.

This time I didn't decline the assignment as I had done before. I remembered Pastor J. Wismar Saragih's words that to study was surely for my own progress and for Simalungun church's future.

## **STUDY IN GERMANY**

Belawan – Bremen: Five weeks

I went to Bremen (Germany) with Umbersius Sumbayak. We departed through Belawan by a trade ship, Hoechst. It took us five weeks through the Suez Canal. I remembered that for some days all we could see were just the ocean and sky. I experienced the fierce waves of the Pacific Ocean which until that time I only heard of from my history lessons. The waves rocked the ship from side to side although they weren't dangerous. Finally, we arrived in Bremen safe and sound. Entering one of the big harbor cities in Germany was a strange experience for me. Everything was new for me. We were met by a Mission's car and then headed for Wuppertal, Barmen.

### School Preparation

Although we had studied German in Indonesia, we had to attend an intensive course in German for several months in Wuppertal – Barmen. It was the center of Rhineland Mission Gesellschaft. We lived in the Missions-haus. After the study, I moved to Hamburg where the State University of Hamburg was located; it was about 400 kilometers away.

During my college years I lived in the Missions academy dorm with some other foreign students. Each of us had our own room. Breakfast and dinner were provided for and we all ate together

in a room while we all ate lunch at the university canteen.

Hamburg University: For knowledge not degree

Studying at the Theological Faculty of Hamburg University opened my mind to new things. The professors, study facilities and discipline of study were very good. One subject was taught by two professors and assisted by four assistants who held Theology Doctorate degrees. The library was fully equipped with all the books that we needed.

During my study in Germany, the students who had scholarship were given chances to visit the churches there. At our long vacation, the RMG assigned us to go to churches that held mission festivals. Besides preaching, we also explained about the mission activities in Indonesia to the congregation.

Finally I completed my study in Hamburg University in 1965, exactly according to the time decided. I did my thesis, a library research project, which was entitled *Die Deutung des Christenleidens im Ersten Petrusbrief* (The Meaning of Christian Suffering in 1 Peter). The title was inspired from the lectures of Prof. Dr. Leonhard Goppelt about the interpretation of the Epistle of Peter. The main point was, even though we had sufferings in our lives, we shouldn't lose faith. God provides in many ways which we never think of.

From Prof. Leonhard, I learned about the philosophy of simplicity and philosophy of studying at school. He always stressed on "Back to the Bible." Besides, he was always an efficient person (went to work by train, never used a car). He also taught us about studying for knowledge so that we could solve problems and not for getting degrees. I have always admired him; every time I travel abroad, I always look for his books. In the USA, some of his books have been translated into English. A strong discipline made me pass. I could defend my

thesis and graduated well. In Germany, before having our thesis examination, we had to have some written tests from the subjects like Old Testament, Church History, Practical Theology and Ecumenics and it took three hours for each of them.

Before returning to Indonesia, RMG asked me to teach Indonesian to Pastor Dr. Ulrich Beyer who would be a professor at the Theological Faculty of HKBP Nommensen in Pematangsiantar. Later Dr. Beyer was sent to London to study English. So I was assigned to accompany him, to teach Indonesian and also to learn English at the place where he studied for two months. Dr. Beyer left for Indonesia while I was in London. RMG gave me another month to study English.

In a short time of two months Dr. Beyer had mastered the Indonesian language well. I heard that when he first gave his lecture, he gave it in Indonesian which had surprised everybody since it was his first time he had ever visited Indonesia. He mastered the language quickly with perseverance and discipline.

### Longing for ministry

After completing my English language course in London for three months, I returned to Indonesia by Hoechst, the same trade ship that I took when I left, also the same route we took. I longed to go back to serve the congregation in Simalungun which I had not seen in four years. I missed my mother, a strong woman who struggled alone after our father's death when my youngest sibling was still in her womb. She worked hard for her children, including me until I completed my Master's degree in theology. I missed my fiancée, Floriana Tobing. We had been engaged before I left for Germany. I missed my dead father who was shot to death by the Dutch in 1947 when he was fighting for his countrymen. I missed my siblings who always prayed and encouraged me. I missed my uncle, Iskander Simanjorang, [and] Tigaraja Nagasaribu who

encouraged me to study at Theological School.

My longings grew more when the ship was closer to Belawan. By the last days on board I was so bored. I could not wait to disembark. I praised God when we finally arrived at Belawan.

I was met by my relatives from Medan who came with some people from our village, including my mother. My fiancée, Floriana Tobing, was waiting for me at GKPS Hang Tuah. They were all so happy to see me and welcomed me with tears in their eyes.

## **MINISTERING A CHURCH**

### A Short Ministry

When I came from Germany, the Church Leader of GKPS appointed me as the Evangelist Pastor – the one to do all evangelizing work in GKPS and had to live in Hang Tuah, Medan. Pastor Umbersius H. Sumbayak was the Parish Pastor at that time.

Our country's economic situation was not good. The value of money was declining, inflation was high and the social condition at that time was very much adversely affected by the September communist uprising. Some in the congregation were suspicious of one another. They needed a more intensive teaching of faith. Not long after, I noticed that the number of congregation members who longed to go to church increased.

Although ministering to a church had been my longing, my ministry in that position only lasted a short time. I was an evangelist pastor for only six months. The Church Leader of GKPS – through initiative of RMG -assigned me to Banua Niha Keriso Protestant (BNKP) to be a teacher in Ombolata Seminary in Gunung Sitoli, on the island of Nias [off the western border of Sumatra]..

Hang Tuah was a historical place for me. I married Floriana

Tobing there on June 15, 1966. Floriana was one of the first nurses from the Batak people who was sent to Germany in the 1950s. She was working as a nurse at Bethesda Hospital Seribudolok when we got married. We were married by Pastor Lesman Purba, the former General Secretary of GKPS.

Three months after we got married I was assigned to Nias. The congregation of GKPS did not want me to leave them, in fact some of them planned to make a petition to the head office of GKPS. They might have thought that after studying abroad why should I minister in another church. I tried to explain to them when we met that my assignment was a response to an inquiry by RMG and that I was glad to go there. They understood and cancelled their plan to petition the head office.

### **OMBOLATA SEMINARY**

On foot for one and a half days

Our assignment to Nias was like a “honeymoon” gift, within the providence of God’s plan. He was preparing something good for me. We left by ship from Sibolga to Nias, a place I had never been to and only heard of in stories. We were accompanied by Pastor C. Sipayung to Ombolata.

Ombolata Seminary was an education center like Sipoholon Seminary in HKBP. I was to teach the pastors, overseers, elders and deacons. The materials to be taught were related to the Bible, church and Christian Education (PAK).

Dr Toepperwein – a RMG staff member—was already working there as the Seminary Director. There were also some pastors from Nias who worked there as well as some staff.

The traditional kings of Nias welcomed us with open hands and really appreciated our work. They often sent us fruit at harvest time and also “jambar” – the gift of meat at festivals. Those



were signs of their welcome to us.

While working at the Seminary, I used to visit and preach at the services among the churches there. Once we visited a congregation in Sirombu, in western Nias by walking for one and a half days. We were sending vicar pastors for their internships at that time.

During my three years assignment in Nias, I became an HKBP pastor unofficially in Gunung Sitoli. At that time Nias was under the administration of HKBP Sibolga. Due to transportation problem, the pastor of HKBP Sibolga often assigned me to minister to their congregation in Gunung Sitoli. I used to conduct the matrimonies, sacrament ceremonies and Sunday services there.

Nias was still underdeveloped at that time. There was only one car owned by Dr Topperwein at the Seminary. It was our only transportation to and from Gunung Sitoli. The roads were still stony and I had to ride a bicycle for nine kilometers to Gunung Sitoli to buy groceries.

Our working contract ended in August 1968 when our second child was born. But due to the security on the ship, it was extended for another three months. Besides precious experiences we had at Nias, it had also become the place of birth for my two sons, John Elisa and Markus Leonard. We left Nias in November 1968. Before leaving I suggested Pastor Waldemar Hasugian, S. Th. from HKBP to be my successor.

## **MANAGING EDUCATION**

Utilizing the Dormitory and the SPW

I did not know where I would be assigned after Nias. My motto was "Wherever I am assigned, God is preparing something good." After returning from the GKPS head office, I received my new assignment from the Church Leadership to be the Director of GKPS

Education Center in Sondiraya.

There was already a High School in the education complex equipped with a dormitory. The Evangelist School for Women (SPW) had got its facilities as well. Sister Elisabeth Steinhard was the dorm head and the SPW Director was Sister Ursulla Woermann.

The urgent concern was to utilize the GKPS dorm and operate the SPW. It was difficult in the beginning to find students who wanted to stay at the school dorm and to find female students for the SPW. Sister Elisabeth once came and asked us to accommodate a girl in our house since she was the only student at the female dorm. There was also very little interest among the Junior High School graduates to become evangelists.

I had to speak directly to the congregations and explain to them about utilizing the facilities. Praise God, after our visit to GKPS Purba Tongah for a service, some female students were encouraged to be women evangelists. That is why many of the church's first women evangelists came from the village.

We didn't do many things during our two year stay there. I had to move back to the head office and received my new duty in 1970.

### **A MERCY TO LEAD GKPS**

To be one of the leaders in the Church Leader of GKPS was not my dream at that time. I was so young, 36 years old. It seemed impossible since most of my predecessors had much more experiences and knowledge than I did.

I was appointed to be General Secretary of GKPS at the Synode Bolon (General Synod) in 1970. I really did not understand why they chose me. I was young and never worked at the head office. Before that, my career was in education field as a teacher.

I was so touched, confused and thankful to God for His blessing for me. Touched, because of how the synod participants trusted me with the job. Confused, because I had never held such a position before. I had been teaching, but not working in administration. I was thankful because I believed it was the grace of God – He was planning something good for me.

My first years as the General Secretary were difficult since I had no prior experience at all. The difference of opinions among the seniors in the Church Leadership Council really bothered me. In two years we hardly smiled in our meetings. It was even impossible to discuss about my pay raise. Thank God, that situation did not last long. God always has many ways to help us in the midst of our troubles.

I held the position as the General Secretary of GKPS for seven years. I worked with Ephorus Pastor Lesman Purba for two years and with Ephorus Pastor SP Dasuha for five years. Pastor Lesman died at his young age when he was attending a meeting in Hungary in 1972. As a general secretary I learned a lot about secretarial jobs in the head office as well as church management from him.

I was then appointed as Ephorus [=Bishop] of GKPS at the 1977 Synod. It was not an easy work. There were so many problems faced by GKPS at that time and I was only able to solve some of them.

There are not many things that I can share from my twenty five years work as one of the GKPS's Church Leaders. One of them was the acknowledgment of our society developmental institution on a national scale which received a Kalpataru award among many others. The service of our hospital, Bethseda Hospital had reached the rural areas, especially in the prevention field which was very much in alignment with our policy at that time.

It was obvious that our society development programs had not reached the point of what we desired. That was the reason why they needed to be improved.

In the ecumenal area, we developed broad relationships with other churches and partners both domestic and foreign. We were involved in the leadership of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and World Council of Churches (WCC).

At least there was some fruit of what I had worked for although I did not record them as my rewards. I often referred to Martin Luther and William Loehe (a German Lutheran pastor in the 19th century). Martin Luther said, "Good works have no name." William Loehe, an outstanding Director of Mission who lived two centuries ago said, "My rewards are for me to serve."

### **BECOMING AN ORDINARY STAFF IN GKPS**

"Power and Money are not everything"

I thanked God that I could accomplish my twenty five years' duty as a decision-maker in GKPS. Then I became just an ordinary staff member who had to submit to the new leader. The GKPS Church Council appointed me as a professor at the Abdi Sabda Theology School in Medan. Becoming a professor was a right assignment for me since I could serve by preparing qualified ministers.

Once I left the church administration staff, automatically I had to return everything that was provided for me before—house, car, driver and other things which were always supposed to be the symbol of power. After that I had to use public transportation ("sudako") and moved to a small house. I used to have secretaries who handled my letters; now I had to write them on my own.

I had to be able to do many things on my own. The lesson for me

was I learned more things that I didn't know before. Operating a computer was one of them. I just realized that operating a computer was the main requirement to enter into global communication. Without computer knowledge I would not be able to use the internet, a global communication medium that connected me to my friends wherever they were.

To become ourselves is difficult. Everyone has to undergo it, not to avoid it. The key is, "My rewards are for me to serve," that saying of Wilhelm Loehe which I always model after.

One thing that made me more enthusiastic after I no longer had "power" was an opportunity to write and deliver the Word of God to all levels of people. I preached at government offices, private, social and political organizations and churches directly or through the media. My opportunity to serve became broader than the time I was just one of the leaders.

I was awarded an honorary Doctorate title when I was just an ordinary staff member. The Academy of Ecumenical Indian Theology, an education institution in Chennai (formerly called Madras) India awarded me the title in 1997. This institution awarded doctorate titles to other church figures in the world. Bishop Christian Krause (The President of the LWF), Bishop Horst Hirschler (Germany) and Dr Ishmael Noko (The Secretary General of Lutheran World Federation) were also awarded the same title by the institution.

It took me some time to think and write my speech for the degree ceremony. I finally found my theme, "The Unlimited Mercy of God." The content of the speech was about my way of life which I presented based on Ephesians 3:20.

Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the inauguration ceremony. There was a fire in the jungle near my home town of Medan with smoke covering the sky. I was already in the waiting

room of Polonia Airport in Medan when it was announced that the flight had been cancelled because the thick smoke endangered the flight. I then sent my speech through the internet and had one of the academy staff there read it for me. The institution then sent me a record of the ceremony on a CD by mail.

I received the unlimited mercy of God even though I had no power and money.

### **ENTERING RETIREMENT PERIOD**

“The unlimited mercy of God”

After serving in GKPS for 41 years, I retired in February 12, 1999. This was an unlimited mercy of God. I received my notification letter from the Church Council sent by mail.

During my retirement, I received greater mercy. I became one of the editors of the World Bible Translation Center (WBTC) in Fort Worth, Texas, US in 2000. In the following year I became the Representative of Crossways International, Minneapolis, USA for Indonesia.

We have translated so many English books into Indonesian that churches now have more choices of reading in order to improve their knowledge and faith.

Although I am retired, I still have some ministry in my own ways and styles. I have a very busy schedule. I still teach at Abdi Sabda Theological Seminary (Medan) as a part-timer with a regular schedule also as the head of the Seminary's library.

The people that God has given me have been special blessings for me. During my retirement, I enjoyed spending time with my grandchildren, Theopil Henry Halomoan Munthe (12 years old), Tamara Cecilia Munthe (6 years old) and Tabita Ria Elisabeth Munthe 3 years old), and Steven Munthe (10 months). They love me

so much.

I am blessed with three sons and one daughter. They are John Elisa Munthe, who is married to Rebecca Ulibasa Situmeang; Markus Leonhard, married to Kurnyati Purba; Pastor Paul Ulrich Munthe, M.Th. (the only pastor in our family, who is now the head of GKPS' Research and Development Department) married to Darty Ramayanti Purba; and my only daughter, Hanna Ruth Munthe, married to Lamsihar Pasaribu. My children's visits have always been a joy for me. My wife, Floriana, has surely been my friend in joy and sorrow. She is the woman who understands my needs, always comforts and creates a warm atmosphere at home. They are all my blessings.

For my friends who are already retired, let us give more from the talents that we have. Let us say, "My rewards are for me to serve." It is true in Psalm 23:6 that God's goodness and mercy will be with me the rest of my life. Let our lives be for God's glory.

Medan, April 2006

Armencius Munthe

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## **Memento mori. Two Reminders of My Mortality**

Colleagues,

Since last Thursday's post two memento mori's have come my way. One was the death of James Danker, son of dear Seminex colleague

and next-door neighbor Fred Danker and his now-sainted wife Lois. Only 53 years old! We had the memorial service last Friday.

The second was the death of John Steven Paul, whizkid speech-and-drama student from my days of teaching theology at Valparaiso University, who later returned to his alma mater to be professor in that field, and in, with, under that calling to profess the Christian faith in drama—and teach others how to do likewise. A lay theologian “first rate.” Only 58 years old!

Children shouldn’t die before their parents, nor students before their teachers, we say. But there it is—twice in this very week.

Unless you know Latin, you may miss the somber message in “memento mori.” It is not: Remember that you WILL die. Somber enough. Rather it is: Remember that you MUST die. The WHEN is on a sliding scale. That “must,” however, is the grimmest edge of the grim reaper’s scythe. That “must” calls for something even more superlative if it is to be trumped.

Crossings colleague Fred Niedner was the homilist at John Steven Paul’s funeral in the V.U. chapel. He sent me a copy. I think he did it with that “even more superlative” trump card. See if you don’t think so too.

Peace and joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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First off, here’s the obit for John Steven Paul, also “my” dear departed.

*John Steven Paul, a Valparaiso undergraduate and Univ of Wisconsin Ph.D., taught theater and drama at Valparaiso University from 1979 until his sudden and unexpected death at*



age 58 on July 10, 2009. He taught courses in dramatic literature, playwriting and screen-writing, drama and the church, and non-Western theatre. He directed more than 60 plays, musicals, and operas. He was the founder (in 1987) and director of Soul Purpose, a liturgical drama troupe that creates new plays and performs them in churches throughout the country. He served since 2005 as Program Director of Valparaiso's Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts, the largest national, ecumenical association of church-related colleges and universities. He was a member of the Bach Choir of Valparaiso University. He is survived by his wife of 29 years, Margaret Franson, along with his parents and two sisters. A funeral service was held in Valparaiso's Chapel of the Resurrection on July 16.

Finally, After So Much Rehearsing, We Dance

**Sermon for the Funeral of John Steven Paul**

**Chapel of the Resurrection, Valparaiso University, 16 July 2009**

**Frederick Niedner** Isaiah 25:6-9

6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. 7 And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. 9 It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

2 Corinthians 4:5-10

5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as

Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

#### *John 11:17-44*

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." 28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw

Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

We are staggered. We are stunned. Many of us have been walking around in a daze since the news began to spread so rapidly on Saturday morning. But as they say in the theater, "The show must go on." So here we are, in one of the primary venues where productions directed by John Steven Paul were staged and performed. This drama's director, the one up there, exultant above the altar [the Christus Rex], gives us the perfect cue for how we shall act in this hour. His gesture signifies victory, of course, but long before anyone used it to proclaim

victory, it was the priestly gesture of giving thanks. So those are the things we'll do today. We will comfort ourselves with the gospel, and we'll throw up our hands in celebration and in thanksgiving.

We give thanks for the innumerable blessings that came to us in and through a remarkably gifted man who played so many roles in the lives of those gathered here today and so many more who cannot be here. Husband, son, brother, uncle, teacher, mentor, colleague, friend-he played all those parts with grace, integrity, humility, wisdom, and good cheer.

For reasons I never thought to question, around the university we commonly used all three of his names when referring to John Steven Paul. And once in a while some of us would joke about his being one of the few people we knew with three first names. John, Steven, and Paul. I don't know the story of how his parents chose those names, or at least the first two, but to me they all sound like biblical names. So here was a man named for a disciple and evangelist (and one who understood drama), a deacon and martyr, and a tireless traveler and ambassador for Christ.

When you hear that list, you know how well each name fit. Our John Steven Paul was all those things. And when you think about it, he really did need all three names. It's obvious from what Mark Schwehn recalled for us a few moments ago that in so many years like this past one at Valparaiso University, John Steven Paul did the work of three people, and some of us wondered if perhaps there were three of him-or them-and we merely saw them one at a time at the meetings we attended. In truth, all institutions, even this one, eventually prove that each of us is ultimately expendable and more or less replaceable. But some, especially when we lose them suddenly, leave behind a bigger hole than others. It will take a while to measure the

full scope of the void John has left.

John's family gives thanks today for a faithful son who honored his parents in their old age as carefully as in his youth, for a kind and loving brother, and for a generous uncle with a marvelous sense of humor. Margaret gives thanks for more than any of us could know after nearly 30 years of making a life together with John. Many of us here today can't yet imagine the world without the remarkable institution in our lives that we have called "JohnandMargaret," kind of like it's all one word and one gracious entity in our lives. For this, too, we give abundant thanks to God who gave us this gift.

We all have our cherished JSP stories. . .about family times, moments in the classroom, Linwood House, the theater, or on tour with Soul Purpose. Some of my own come from long ago, when John and Margaret were my next door neighbors in one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in Valparaiso. Back in the bad old days of single-sex residence halls, I was director of Brandt Hall, while John and Margaret did their best to tame the insanity of Wehrenberg, at the time an all-male freshman dorm. (Think about it!) You can imagine how much we had to learn about drama, and how much we needed to laugh. . .but only afterwards.

I've heard and read countless, informal tributes to John Steven Paul in the last few days, from colleagues in many university departments, from alumni all over the world, from Lilly Fellows and former Lilly Fellows, and from "the Porpoises," veterans of the Soul Purpose drama troupe. I've heard John described as a teacher and director who asked for hard work and rigorous attention to detail, but who, on performance night or when the final papers came in, never lamented or berated anyone for the failure to achieve perfection. Instead, he gave thanks for all that went well.

*Students, actors, and younger colleagues trusted John with their souls, not merely their lives. For some of them he believed, even when they could not, until they could find their way back. To my knowledge, he leaves behind no enemies, and for one who chaired the University Senate, led several key searches, and served on countless committees, including the Assessment Committee, that is beyond remarkable. For all of this, we throw up our hands in humble thanks.*

*As Mark Schwehn reminded us, one who serves as a program administrator and theater director works off-stage, out of the spotlight, teaching and preparing, getting things ready, making sure that players on the stage have everything and every directive they need. We wouldn't be too far off if we described John Steven Paul as one who spent most of his life in rehearsal. Just imagine how many rehearsals he attended or conducted in one way or another, given the 60 theater productions he directed, the choirs in which he sang, and all those Soul Purpose pieces.*

*Of all the scripts he rehearsed, I doubt that any of them got more frequent attention in John's life than the one that grew out of the gospel lesson chosen for this service. Almost from its inception in 1987, Soul Purpose performed a liturgical drama entitled "And They Danced," which is a way to proclaim the gospel as we read and hear it in the 11th chapter of John. "And They Danced" tells the story of Lazarus' death, the dismay and anger of Mary and Martha over Jesus' delay in coming when their brother fell ill and they sent word, and ultimately the celebration that John's gospel doesn't mention, but which the family and the people of Bethany surely had, when Jesus spoke and Lazarus came out of the tomb and lived.*

*As so many of you know, when the play draws to its close, the cast turns to the congregation and says, "But none of this*

could have happened, except first Lazarus had died. There is no rising to new life except first there is dying. And only from INSIDE the tomb do we hear the voice of Jesus call, 'Lazarus, come forth!'" Dear friends, here is the truth of our lives, and here, too, begins the word of good news on this day when we face a staggering loss. For the last twenty years, all the rehearsals for "And They Danced," and every performance as well, done as they were all over the country, not just here, were practice and preparation for this day. Today we finally are, for real, the family of Lazarus, the people of Bethany. Our brother is dead. It's no longer just a play.

Our only hope in this moment is the same one that Mary and Martha had, the coming of the young man who, as it happened, was on his way toward Jerusalem when the call came about Lazarus. Indeed, we must see everything that Jesus said and did when he finally got to Bethany as part of that journey to Jerusalem, else we misunderstand it-and miss the real reason for dancing. Within a very few days, Jesus himself would be in a tomb, dead as an executioner's nail, so when he called into Lazarus' tomb, instead of shouting, "Lazarus, come out of there," he might just as well have said, "Heads up, Lazarus, I'm coming in to join you!"

There is no place Lazarus or any of the rest of us could ever end up, but that this one has gone or will go there, too. And only from INSIDE the tomb can we hear the crucified one call us, "Lazarus, John, Margaret, Jane, Joanne, Mark, come forth!"

Yes, put your name in that call, too, for we're all in a tomb today-a tomb of grief and sorrow, with a numbing sense that not just John, but part of us is gone as well. Notice, too, that this man on the way to Jerusalem entered that kind of tomb as well, the realm of deep grieving, as he wept openly, and in the gospel's language, "was greatly disturbed." God knows our

emptiness. God knows.

To what does this one call us when he rouses us from our tombs, or from our grief? In the case of Lazarus, Jesus called him to a remarkably perilous journey, the one that led directly to the cross. According to John's gospel, this meant that Lazarus, too, was marked for death. How strange, that Jesus would raise Lazarus from one kind of death only to get him quickly killed with another.

But that, too, is our story. And it's our only hope, that we will hear the voice from *INSIDE* this tomb, and head out somewhere to die a different kind of death, the kind that comes from giving our lives away-in service, in sacrifice, in offering them up for love.

That was the story of John Steven Paul's life as a baptized child of God-daily dying and daily rising, only to die again in giving his life away in service, so many times to one of us. And this is our story, too. Over and over again we practice . . . until the day that twenty or thirty, or a hundred, or maybe a throng like this one will gather to throw up their hands in thanks for us because this time we played Lazarus' role for real. We do none of this alone. When we die, we die with Christ. When we live, we live with Christ. But in these days of stumbling around in tightly-bound grave-clothes we also live with and within the body of Christ. Notice how Jesus puts Lazarus in the care of the community whom he charges, "Unbind him. Set this one free."

That's who we are here, the gathering of grave-cloth strippers. You can barely sing, and it's even harder to walk, wrapped up in the clothes of mourning or in one of those mummy things, and you surely cannot dance. And friends, we do have some singing and dancing to do-tentatively at first, but we'll learn the



steps.

*And we have this meal to share, which is, dear people, truly part of an endless celebration, the very same sharing of bread and cup that began in those days soon after that scene with Lazarus in Bethany. We call it a foretaste of the feast to come, something we'll need to rehearse for the rest of our lives, but even now, and especially in a moment like this one, we comfort one another with the promise from God that when we gather at this table, we are part of the cast in the one, great scene upon the vast stage of heaven and earth on which the curtain will never fall.*

*In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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# **The Crossings Matrix (Diagnosis/Prognosis) Keeps Moving**

Colleagues,

The Crossings matrix (Diagnosis/Prognosis) keeps moving—to people and places that surprise me. Is it the “Platzregen” phenomenon, Luther’s thunder-shower metaphor for the Gospel’s own “free course . . . to the joy and edifying of Christ’s people on earth”? Why do I ask that? Two serendipity emails have come into my in-basket since the Fourth of July that elicit the image of a moving downpour coming “without warning.”

FIRST ONE on July 7 from Armencius Munthe in Medan, on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. Armencius, retired bishop and seminary professor from one of the Batak Lutheran churches, attended last year's Crossings conference here in St. Louis. He got hooked on Bertram's six-step diagnosis/prognosis scheme for studying Biblical texts, and spent an extra day talking it through with me before he headed back home. On July 7 he sends me this: "I was asked to do Bible Study for a conference of 500 Methodists here. I did diagnosis/prognosis with Philippians 2. Many were amazed at what they heard."

SECOND ONE just a couple of days ago brings to my in-basket what I reprint below, a text-study along with a proposed crossing from that text to the ELCA's current kerfuffle with sexuality. Peter Keyel is a member of our congregation here in St. Louis. He's close to closure on the "post-doc" at Washington University's Medical School that originally brought him to us. Later this year he will be heading elsewhere. Peter and I have talked briefly about the ELCA sexuality issue—and that just in the past few months. He's never attended a Crossings course, workshop, or conference. I never told him any Crossings "secrets." What he knows about the diagnosis/prognosis matrix and—as you will see—the skill he's mastered in using it, he discovered on his own from the Crossings website. Like those Indonesian Methodists, I am amazed. You may be too. So read on.

[I asked Peter to introduce himself, which he does with excessive modesty in three sentences.]

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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*Dr Peter Keyel is a layman who works in immunology and was raised in the ELCA. He got more than he bargained for when he*

*asked Ed about a Biblical justification of homosexuality and was instead given a Lutheran Law/Gospel lens for considering it. Pleased to be free of the Biblicism he'd fallen into, Peter is now trying to apply what he's learned more generally.*

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## **Luke 9:1-6**

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, <sup>2</sup>and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. <sup>3</sup>He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money-not even an extra tunic. <sup>4</sup>Whatever house you enter, stay there and leave from there. <sup>5</sup>Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." <sup>6</sup>They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

### **D1 Demons and disease**

We all suffer from sickness at some point in our life. We know it as a scourge that takes the health from us and our loved ones, sometimes with very little warning at all. We invest billions of dollars trying to find cures, and while we've come a long way in the field of medicine since Jesus' time, it still isn't enough. Millions still suffer and die from cancer, malaria, AIDS, and more. It's clear why Jesus would send his disciples out to cure the sick. These are still problems that face Jesus' disciples and His church today.

### **D2 Trusting the wrong authority**

Slightly more confusing, though, is that the disciples are also being sent out to proclaim the kingdom of God. They're going out to God's Chosen People in the Promised Land. Why should there be any need to proclaim the kingdom at all in this place? The easy

answer is that they have fallen away, or no longer believe. However, this is not the case. These are largely practicing Jews who have the Law and Scripture. They believe that they are serving God to the best of their ability. In fact, since knowing the Law is what is thought to please God, they've become legal experts. But in so doing, they have placed their trust in the Law, and not in the God who created that Law. Today, the issue has turned around. Paralyzed by fears that some in the ELCA will not be happy with decisions it makes, the ELCA tries to dodge decision-making. The condemnation preached by the Law is a hard pill to swallow, and so the ELCA avoids that as well. There are some in the ELCA who realize this, and try to push it back to the Law. Unfortunately, these efforts would return the ELCA to the legal expertise of the Pharisees.

### **D3 No Kingdom**

The proclamation of God's kingdom must have come as a slap in the face to many people the disciples went to. Even the authority to cure the sick and drive out demons lays the people's unbelief bare... for if they had the kingdom, wouldn't they also have the authority to heal their own? The Law and Scripture makes it very clear what the consequences are for turning down God. Even in the face of authority over demons and sickness, entire villages would reject the disciples. They have to in order to serve their system of Law. Unfortunately for them, that system leads to death for everyone. The ELCA is similarly headed on track for death. On one hand, we arrogantly demand God's grace as our right. After all, it's only natural that a God who loves us owes us the entire kingdom, right? In losing sight of the Law we have also lost the Gospel. And that leaves us condemned before God with no hope. Fearing this, a significant minority cries out for a complete return to the Law. In so doing, they would silence the witness of the Spirit active today in those they judge sinners-non-celibate homosexuals among

others-because it does not conform to their understanding of the Law. Unfortunately, a return to the Law is a return to the system of death that leaves us condemned before God with no hope.

#### **P4 Jesus brings the kingdom to us**

However, Christ comes to us in our sin. Even more surprising, He takes our sins upon Himself, and suffers the penalty for them. The Law is fulfilled in Christ's death, and it leaves reconciliation open to all. The legal system of death that justly condemned us is replaced with the Kingdom. Likewise, the Gospel-God's promise to be merciful to sinners because of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection-is the ELCA's only hope for survival. We must keep the Gospel at the forefront in all of our discussions, for only through the Gospel is the church justified. We must ever be mindful of the cost that God Himself paid for us on the cross.

#### **P5 Christ gives us authority**

That reconciliation cannot help but transform us, leaving us both repentant before God, humbled before His glory and enthusiastic to walk with Him. Christ gathers us in, and gives us authority. Not the authority to set new rules, but to cast out demons, cure sicknesses and proclaim the kingdom. When the ELCA's Gospel is Christ's Gospel, it is no longer paralyzed. It is able and given the authority to cast out demons, cure sickness and proclaim the kingdom of God. It moves forward as a body united in Christ, confident that all are one in Him.

#### **P6 Casting out demons and curing diseases everywhere**

The Twelve are sent out into the world empowered by Christ to go to others who are undeserving, not with judgment, but with healing. They go to cast out demons, cure sickness, and proclaim God's kingdom. With Christ at their center, they do not need to worry about staff, bag, bread, money or clothing... Christ is sufficient. They may not succeed everywhere, but Christ tells

them that they don't have to. Similarly, at the ELCA churchwide assembly, we will not solve all of our problems. But, united in Christ, we don't have to. We have to proclaim the kingdom of God, cast out demons and cure sicknesses. We do not need to worry about bag, bread, money or clothing. If one child proclaiming the Gospel is greater than all the popes, powers and principalities, just think of the potential an entire church body confessing Christ has. It's time for us to realize that potential.

Peter Keyel  
St Louis, MO

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## **Seminex at Thirty-Five.**

Colleagues,

For the Seminex 35th birthday party—you had to have been there. Well over 200 of us, they said, gathered at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. Three days concluding on June 25, the 479th anniversary of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. Some of you on this listserve were there. For those who weren't, but might have wished you were, here's what I brought back home from the celebration.

Sure there was lots of nostalgia, "Auld Lang Syne" stuff, but that wasn't all. For me it began in the first seconds of the hymn for the opening worship. The singing! The singing!

With those four words I'm actually quoting a voice from an earlier time for confessing, namely, Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's seminary student, eventual in-law and later

biographer. Here's where he said it. On the 50th anniversary of the Barmen Confession from the days of the Kirchenkampf in Hitler's Germany, a celebration was held in Seattle USA. That was 1984. [Bob Bertram and Gary Simpson were there and told me this.] Bethge was on the program speaking about his student days at the exile seminary of the Confessing Church (Finkenwalde) under Bonhoeffer's leadership. Someone in the Seattle audience asked him: "Have you ever had any experience similar to those days in Finkenwalde?" "Yes," he said, "Once. I visited Seminex. The singing! The singing!"

For our birthday party too, one thick golden thread was "The singing! The singing!"

I won't reprint the program. Lots of stuff. Besides the five (I think) liturgies, major presentations from alumni and profs, reminiscing and looking forward. Also some significant outsiders invited in to tell us how they saw us way back then and also now. Seminex's ancient student comics showing that they hadn't lost their stuff. Panel presentations. Class pictures, of course, and input from Seminex profs' "kids" and Seminex spouses. For more details of all that happened GO to [http://www.lstc.edu/alums\\_friends/seminexreunion.html](http://www.lstc.edu/alums_friends/seminexreunion.html)

The main item for this ThTh post is the sermon that blessed us at the closing Holy Communion celebration. But before that, just a few highlights.

- ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS with dozens of dear ones—catching up on their stories, with them also reminding me of things I did/said that I have long forgotten. Some of them even "nice."
- FINAL KEYNOTER, the presiding bishop of the ELCA, Mark Hanson. To answer his own question "Where is the Seminex legacy now?" he mentioned the hundreds of alums in ELCA

pastorates, the five now ELCA bishops, the two seminary presidents. Somewhere along the way he held up a Crossings newsletter (February 2009) and quoted from it. [I kid you not. No, I hadn't paid him. I was stunned.] He claimed to see the legacy there. But then he put icing on the cake as he came to closure. He held up Bob Bertram's recently-published book, "A Time for Confessing," quoted from it and added his own call to "those of you who have lived deeply with this theological tradition" to new times for confessing—also in the ELCA.

- SOME STATISTICS

- Memorialized—name by name—were the 21 profs, nearly one-half of the original exiled faculty, who have died since Seminex's birth in 1974. Of the 25 survivors not yet gone to glory, 15 were present for the celebration.
- Total graduates of Seminex (1974-83) 750
- Rostered in ELCA 372
- Rostered in LCMS 110
- Rostered in Other Denominations 13
- Percent currently rostered 66%
- Unknown 243
- Deceased 12

- MY SPOT ON THE PROGRAM

I was one of five goldie-oldies granted 10 minutes each on a panel under the rubric: "How my mind has changed." As you probably guessed, mine hadn't. But—also no surprise—I did fill up my 10-minute allotment.

- AGAIN AND AGAIN— The singing! The singing!

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NOW to the homily for the closing worship on Augsburg Confession Day, June 25, 2009. Proclaimers were alumnae Pastor Donna Herzfeldt-Kamprath [hereafter DHK] and Pastor Joan (Lundgren)



Beck [JLB] in a parallel pas-de-deux offering. Each of them now serves a parish in Oregon.

Biblical text was the appointed second lesson, 1 Corinthians 3:11-23.

*11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved-even though only as one escaping through the flames. 16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.*

*18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; 20 and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." 21 So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future-all are yours, 23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.*

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**DHK**

One evening during the 1971 LCMS Milwaukee Convention, Doc

Caemmerer said to John and Ernestine Tietjen and Arthur C. Repp, "The two views about Lutheranism that are in contention right now are as different as a box is different from a platform. The Preus people think of Lutheranism as a box. You have to be in the box to be a Lutheran. The box tells you what you can believe and what you can't believe. If you don't agree on the truth in the box, you have to get out. But Lutheranism is really a platform on which to stand. The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions that witness to what they teach are the ground of our life together. They are the platform on which we stand to witness to what we believe. As rule and norm the Scriptures help us make sure that we speak the Word of God when we witness. The Confessions free us up to witness to what is the heart of our faith – Jesus Christ – and the good news that we are justified by faith in him." (MEMOIRS IN EXILE, Tietjen, p. 72)

### **JLB**

The Lord be with you. AND ALSO WITH YOU. Let us pray. Builder God, we marvel at your plan from of old. We commend our lives, our work, our church, our world into your wise design. Let your Spirit speak, and inspire hearing of this word. Amen.

### **DHK**

This invitation to preach is like an invitation to "touch home base." I was one of those in the field when Seminex deployed in 1983. My internship year was spent in Evansville, Indiana. I was engaged to Tim, who was serving in his first year in southern Manitoba in a 2-point LCA parish as a pastor/intern. This sermon feels a little like a fourth-year project for the year I never got to complete with all of you! In that sense, Seminex has always been "out there" for me, like an elusive "Camelot"—a memory, a dream, a hope that still exists, and can never die.

I remember being in high school in the early 1970s, listening to the sound track of "Camelot" over and over again. The story of

King Arthur and the knights, Queen Guinevere and the round table is so romantic. The ending is so poignant. After all the love and struggle, betrayals and high hopes, the time comes for the reality to change and fade away, and the work of telling the story to begin. King Arthur—in the midst of the battle that finally brings down the court he has built up—calls to the young boy page and commissions him to go and tell:

*Ask ev'ry person if he's heard the story,  
And tell it strong and clear if he has not,  
That once there was a fleeting wisp of glory  
Called Camelot.... Don't let it be forgot  
That once there was a spot  
For one brief shining moment that was known  
As Camelot.*

In 1974 I was a sophomore at Northwestern University. I had been invited to the Lutheran Campus Ministry Center where an LCMS congregation shared a home with an ALC/LCA congregation, each with their own pastor, membership, worship, and activities. Who would have thought there were other Lutherans out there?! Not a young LCMS girl from Sheboygan, Wisconsin! And conflict in the church? What was that all about?!

Well, we had visitors who came and told us what it was all about. Young, energetic seminary students on Operation Outreach, who were in the thick of the conflict, and passionate about what God was doing in the church, came to tell the story. I don't remember a lot about what they said, but I remember the story was told with fervor, and that this story was having real consequences in some of my new friends' families (such as the Krentz family).

When the time came for me to discern my call into ordained ministry in the late 1970s, Seminex had been operating in St.

Louis for about 5 years. It was my first choice for the seminary I wanted to attend. Deep inside I believe I wanted to be a part of the passion, the calling to proclaim the true Gospel word, the “fleeting wisp of glory.” Oops, did I say “glory”?

OK, maybe a little bit of glory ... walking in the footsteps of Dr. Tietjen and other great leaders who had braved the battles and shown the Lutheran church a new path! I wanted to find my place at that “round table” where I imagined women and men shared equally in ministry, where people coming from other careers instead of through “the system” were fully respected, where laying down one’s life for those who were poor and victimized in this world was expected. I entered Camelot—I mean, Seminex—in 1980.

## **JLB**

Already in 1974, the glory of Camelot had faded for me. I did three of my four years of seminary with you, through my internship. I was on campus for the death of Arthur Carl Piepkorn, the suspension of Dr. Tietjen, the moratorium, the walkout. I remember getting fired up by Operation Outreach. I headed to Iowa, eager to tell the story, too. The public story emitted an energy that people wanted to gather around; but my personal story with the seminary was dying down. It didn’t take long before I felt like an ember that somehow got kicked away from the fire and would soon lose its spark. There was harassment from other students. There was the time when a black pastor and a white pastor together at my field work congregation refused to let me help with communion because I was a woman—and “help with communion” meant holding the silver tray where people put their empty glasses. When the district president eventually learned that I was doing field work, he called me in for a meeting, telling me that as a woman in ministry I was in violation of scripture, and the ministry was surely going down the toilet. I was really burned! Yet in that moment, face to

face with that critique, I touched the foundation. The Spirit ignited me, and boldly I proclaimed, "I have a call from God to preach the gospel." Which made the district president sit up, sit back, and fall silent. In 1976, after vicarage, I found myself heading out of the Seminex camp to finish my training at Luther Seminary in St. Paul.

In these days [here at the reunion] many stories have been expressed, not all easy to hear or receive. And we know there are many other stories out there—maybe as many as 243 stories—that we don't even know how to get to. Expressions of pain make us uncomfortable; our indiscretions burn bridges between us; our emptiness snuffs out light and life. As James Wind said, "What we did those days was very human."

### **DHK**

Camelot in crisis. What happens when the castle crashes, and the round table is cracked, and the human frailties break bonds of friendship and trust inside the walls we've constructed to protect ourselves and to identify ourselves in the world? We've been talking about breakdown and conflict and brokenness in the LCMS on this 35th anniversary—as if we were standing around a bonfire, enjoying the warmth and stories. But what if instead of throwing more LCMS logs on the fire, we admit, we acknowledge, we confess that there are logs of our own conflict, breakdown and brokenness that need to be thrown on the fire, too? God requires, invites, demands a day to disclose the quality of our work, to reveal it with fire. Do you want the whole story, or will we be satisfied with fleeting glimpses of glory?

### **JLB**

Speakers in these days have challenged us to look over the walls and out of the turrets to understand what materials from the culture of the sixties and seventies may have contributed to the building of Seminex. Some were sturdy; some were precious; some

have already disintegrated. Is there a foundation there? One which will hold what we now have to build for the 21st century church? A few years ago I heard Justo Gonzalez speaking as a prophet, saying, "The Spirit is preparing the churches for the collapse of Western capitalism. Where will you be then?" We cannot see and know what is coming. When the people of Corinth were scrambling to build on foundations of courageous leaders, wise doctrine, or worldly power, Paul warned them of fire. Fire that would test, and fire that would reward. But only One could use that fire properly; only One could control that fire. The Day of disclosure will come for every one, and every institution. Fire and smoke.

### DHK

Fire and smoke and fear. The story is played out every fire season, particularly across the dry, dry West. A few years ago the Biscuit Fire took hold in southwest Oregon, eating its way through thousands and thousands of acres of forest and wilderness. The fire had to do its work, even though humans tried to manage it. One of the places engulfed in smoke and debris during this fire was the small town of Cave Junction. Our cluster colleague, Pastor Peg, and the people were fatigued. Smoke was in their eyes and lungs. They were living moment to moment, on the edge of life and death. Peg prepared, along with the congregation and community folks, to be ready to evacuate at any moment. In all her ministry, she had never done this before, but she told us that she had put in the trunk of her car the bread and the cup, the cross and the Bible, ready to go whenever the fire dictated, and wherever the people would go. These were the things she trusted and knew would draw the people together in the face of the fire, and sustain them even if homes and businesses and church building and all the structures of the community were destroyed. The people and the Word and the Sacraments. The church.

**JLB**

When is fire Good News for the people of God, and for our world? God, the one true Builder, knows the durability of the foundation, for this Builder has laid it from the very beginning. This One knows what fire will cleanse, what fire will clear away and reveal, what fire will test, mold, and transform. Fire in the toolkit of this Builder is good and necessary. Fire is good news when it reveals the true foundation—"that foundation is Jesus Christ." Christ, who chose to suffer loss for our sake, who burned with love that would be attacked, betrayed, abandoned, smothered, and snuffed out. But rekindled by God on the third day and never again extinguished. Christ, who holds out for us to drink the cup of his own baptism with fire. Will you take? Will you drink? Will you be consumed with this burning love?

**DHK**

The walls, table, and community of Camelot were destroyed; what came through the firestorm were the story and the song, carried out into the world in the voices and lives of people, people telling the WHOLE STORY. Paul says the whole story of God belongs to you, shapes and informs your whole life: "... whether the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."

**JLB**

We are a people who have learned to evacuate before, who have survived all kinds of fire and storms, and who trust in the Builder of all firm foundations. We can evacuate now. We can help the church around us let go of structures and systems when their inferior quality is revealed. Respect the power of the fire, fear the One who yields the fire, but follow the One who knows the way through the fire! Come, Holy Spirit, come!

And wonder of wonders, we have the foundation to take with us! Doesn't that sound more than a little foolish?! Look! This foundation is portable; he can walk and run and float and swim and fly. He can move on:

- rising up from the water to meet our toes dangling in dangerous depths!
- spreading out as the tablecloth on the ground to serve the meal that sustains us in the midst of our enemies!
- connecting believers on a common network of texts and tweets that rally them for faithful action!
- carried in our arms, unfolded and laid out on any gymnasium floor or open space, in a labyrinth pattern inviting youth and children and adults to wander and pray, guided by the Spirit!

## DHK

This space has been ringing and alive with the voices, stories, and songs of Seminex. We are grateful for the hospitality of LSTC, our Chicago brothers and sisters, and one another. WHENever your story may have begun with Seminex, and WHATEver stories we have yet to discover and share, we know that this time together is a temporary structure for the life we have lived and celebrated. Think of it as a platform or launching pad for the lives and ministries we are called to build up, remodel, and portray in the world.

For a 1981 Advent prayer book prepared by Seminex students, John Tietjen wrote these words that now send us out:

*You still need messengers, don't you, Lord,  
to speak your truth to the world  
to prepare the way for your Christ.  
You still use strange people, too!  
Why should we find it strange  
that you should choose to use us?In the desert of our lives,*



*Lord,  
stiffen our backs  
breathe life into our bones  
to speak your truth  
to point to your Christ  
no matter what the cost.*

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## **Augsburg Confessional Theology and the Sexuality Debate Part Two: A Canadian Sequel to Last Week's Post.**

Colleagues,

One of the responses to last week's post came from Canada. Co-crosser Hal Remus alerted me to the parallel debate in the ELCIC [Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada] and he sent me the "nay" and the "yea" documents, both of which I pass on to you here. Just plain "super," to my mind, was the Augsburg-Confession-grounding of the yea-sayers.

Hal tells me that this Augsburg-anchored text comes from "a small group of Alberta pastors . . . in response to their fellow Alberta pastors who issued a Confessional Ministerium Statement stating their convictions that the ELCIC was "depart[ing] from the traditional faith and practice of the Church" with its openness on the homosexual issue.

To learn more about the nay-sayers, go to <http://www.confessionalministerium.ca/>

To learn more about the yea-sayers, go to <http://www.webelieveinthegospel.org/20201.html>

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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### *Confessional Ministerium Statement*

*In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

*We the members of the Confessional Ministerium have entered into this fellowship for mutual encouragement and accountability, as we work to fulfill the vows we made at our ordination. We do so for our sake, for the sake of the congregations we serve, and for the sake of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.*

*We are aware of forces within the ELCIC that would divert it from the traditional faith and practice of the Church catholic, thus we believe it necessary to confess and call attention to the following.*

- *We confess that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and the norm for the faith of the Church, containing all things necessary for salvation. As such the Bible is to be read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain canonical sense, respectful of the church's historic and consensual reading.*
- *We accept, teach, and confess the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. We also acknowledge the Lutheran Confessions as true witnesses and faithful expositions of*

*the Holy Scriptures.*

- *We confess the Holy Sacrament of Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to be the means through which individuals are brought into the body of Christ. We confess the Sacrament of Holy Communion to be the means by which the baptized believer is nourished by the reception of the true body and blood of Jesus Christ. Through these sacraments and through the rite of confession and absolution, the Christian receives forgiveness of sins.*
- *We submit to and proclaim the unique and universal Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, humanity's only Saviour from sin, judgment and hell. By His atoning death and glorious resurrection, He secured the redemption of all creation. We proclaim this Gospel in the hope that all will come to Him in repentance and faith.*
- *We acknowledge and submit to the exercise of proper and Godly authority within the church by those called and set apart for the ministry of oversight. We also acknowledge that those called to this ministry, whether Pastors, Deacons, or Bishops, are to exercise that authority within the bounds of Scripture, Creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions.*
- *We acknowledge the marriage relationship of one man and one woman as an order of God's good creation. This relationship is the proper place for sexual intimacy, the basis of the family, and the primary place where people are instructed and grow in faith. Children are to be welcomed as a gift to the marriage relationship. We repent of our failures to maintain and uphold this standard and call for a renewed commitment to lifelong fidelity in marriage and abstinence and support for those who are not married.*
- *While we hope and pray the ELCIC will not choose to depart from the traditional faith and practice of the Church we*

*believe it necessary, as leaders of congregations, to prepare for that possibility and prayerfully discern in which direction we must go in order that we might preserve our unity with the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.*

We make this statement, aware of our complete and total dependence on the grace of God. We trust the Holy Spirit will complete what is lacking, lead and guide us, and our congregations in faithful discipleship.

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### **The response:**

WE BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

An Open Letter to the Rostered Leaders and Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

April 8, 2009

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Every generation encounters its own crisis of faith. Each crisis is a call for the church to return to the heart of its faith in order to reflect and discern. What does it mean to be church? What is the Gospel? What do the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions say concerning the issues? Our identity as Lutherans is centered in the Gospel, articulated most clearly in Article IV on Justification in The Augsburg Confession:

*Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us*

*and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21-26] and 4[:5] (CA IV:1-3, Kolb, Wengert, p. 38, 40).*

Healthy discussion on issues of concern is made possible because our identity as Lutherans is never in question. As the reformers so carefully summarized our faith in Article IV, we “receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ’s sake through faith...” Christ is the peace between us and the source of our unity (Ephesians 2:14-22). Our unity in Christ and as the church is a gift of the Holy Spirit. This means that despite our most vigorous disagreements, we are nonetheless part of the one body of Christ. We have been baptized into Christ and so we belong to him and relate to one another as one family of God. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:5-6).

Yet, there are some pastors who have formed a group called the “Confessional Ministerium” who seek to separate themselves from the ELCIC. The Confessional Ministerium has created a brochure entitled, “The Confessional Ministerium: The Courage to Be Lutheran.” This brochure states that there are “forces within the ELCIC” who have taken a “revisionist understanding of the gospel” with regard to “the heated controversies regarding human sexuality and the attending profound gift of God in marriage.” The members of the Confessional Ministerium have also committed to resign from the ELCIC as a group “when we agree that the gospel has been abandoned.”

The purpose of this open letter to the churches is to provide a

response to the Confessional Ministerium, especially with regard to the allegations that the church has revised and is about to abandon the Gospel. To do this we return to the Lutheran Confessions to seek clarity on the question: What IS the Gospel? We must never tire of asking this fundamental question as it is the teaching upon which the church stands or falls. Finally, this letter is also a call to seek the unity of the church, the body of Christ, and to refrain from schism.

We confess our faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But what is the Gospel? In The Apology of The Augsburg Confession the following definition of the Gospel is given: the Gospel is, "strictly speaking, the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification on account of Christ" (Ap IV:43, Kolb, Wengert, p. 127).

In THE FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN, Luther also writes: "The Word is the gospel of God concerning his Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies. To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided it believes the preaching" (Dillenberger, ed., p. 55).

These two beautiful passages ring out like a clarion bell almost five centuries after they were originally written. They are decisive in their proclamation of the Gospel as "the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ." Because God is the God of steadfast love, God's promises are trustworthy and true. They are eternally valid. In Baptism our identity is forever changed. God freely chooses to make us sons and daughters of God, members of God's family. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, God has chosen to extend the promise of forgiveness of sins to us. This is the Gospel.

So where do we as human beings come in? The only way to receive

a promise is to trust that God's promise in Christ is for us too, that is, to have faith in the promise. Such faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. "For faith does not justify or save because it is a worthy work in and of itself, but only because it receives the promised mercy" (Ap IV:56, Kolb, Wengert, p. 129). And as Paul also writes, "... if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

The reformers expressed two main concerns in articulating the Gospel as God's promise. First, it makes Christ necessary for salvation. The Gospel is the exclusive domain of what God is doing for us. All of our own efforts to save ourselves through our own good deeds, achievements, or personal piety fall short. "There is no one who is righteous, not even one...there is no one who seeks God" (Romans 3:10-11). Expanding on this passage in Romans, Luther writes: "When you have learned this you will know that you need Christ, who suffered and rose again for you so that, if you believe in him, you may through this faith become a new man in so far as your sins are forgiven and you are justified by the merits of another, namely of Christ alone" (FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN, Dillenberger, p. 56).

Second, the reformers had a pastoral concern to comfort the terrified consciences of those who believed themselves condemned because of their inability to fulfill the law or meet some moral standard of perfection and purity. If we are responsible for our own salvation, then how can we ever be assured that we have done enough, or loved enough, or are perfect enough? The reformers therefore rejected as "incorrect and harmful when it is taught that the gospel is, strictly speaking, a proclamation of repentance or retribution and not exclusively a proclamation of grace. For in this way the gospel is again made into a teaching of the law, the merit of Christ and the Holy Scriptures are obscured, Christians are robbed of true comfort, and the door is

opened again to the papacy" (FC Ep V:11, Kolb, Wengert, p.501).

In summary, the Gospel makes Christ necessary for salvation and comforts terrified consciences. The Gospel is the pure expression of God's unconditional and gracious love for the ungodly, the condemned, sinners, that is, for us all. In short, the Gospel is about what God is doing through Christ for us. It is never about what human beings can do to save themselves.

Let us now turn to the claims found in the brochure entitled, "The Confessional Ministerium: The Courage to be Lutheran." The Confessional Ministerium expresses deep concern "for the direction the ELCIC has been taking towards a revisionist understanding of the gospel." Has the ELCIC, through its constitution, faith, and practice ceased to profess the Gospel as "the forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ"? As a human institution, its actions reflect the paradox that we are at the same time saint and sinner. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit has created the church and is found within it whenever the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are rightly administered. Wherever Christ alone is proclaimed and terrified consciences are thereby comforted, THERE is the Holy Spirit and THERE is the church.

The Confessional Ministerium, on the other hand, insists that "the traditional faith and practice of the Church catholic" on the question of human sexuality and marriage is a matter of the Gospel. To make the church's historical understanding of human sexuality and marriage a matter of the Gospel is precisely where the Confessional Ministerium errs. For this would mean that faith alone in Christ alone is no longer sufficient. One must also have an unwavering faith in a particular practice of the church. But this is to turn the UNCONDITIONAL Gospel of Christ into a CONDITIONAL gospel, which is no Gospel at all.



Ironically, those who accuse others of abandoning the Gospel have themselves revised and abandoned it by turning it into law. Rather than confessing that faith in the Gospel is sufficient for salvation, the Confessional Ministerium wants to add something extra to it, that is, to make a particular traditional practice of the church a requirement of faith equivalent to faith in the Gospel. However, "Faith is that worship which receives the benefits that God offers; the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. God wants to be honored by faith..." (Ap IV:49, Kolb, Wengert, p. 128). How is the Confessional Ministerium's advocacy of the righteousness of the law different from the "judaizers" that Paul refutes in Galatians, those who wished to add circumcision as a requirement or condition for believers? In response to those who sought the righteousness of the law, Paul exclaims: "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing" (Galatians 2:21).

As Robert W. Jenson wrote in LUTHERANISM: THE THEOLOGICAL MOVEMENT AND ITS CONFESSIONAL WRITINGS, " 'The gospel' is the Reformation label for that promise which, if true at all, is unconditional: the promise made in the name of one who has already satisfied the condition of death and therefore has all future in his gift... The gospel tolerates no conditions. It is itself unconditional promise" (p. 44). The reformers also had strong words for those in their day who denied that faith in the promise was enough for salvation: "Therefore those who deny that faith justifies do away with both the gospel and Christ and teach nothing but law" (Ap IV:70, Kolb, Wengert, p. 132). In his Large Catechism Luther writes: "...all who would seek to merit holiness through their works rather than through the gospel and the forgiveness of sin HAVE EXPELLED AND SEPARATED THEMSELVES FROM [THE CHRISTIAN] COMMUNITY" (emphasis added, LC, Part II, The Third Article: 56, Kolb, Wengert, p. 438).

We are grieved that members of the Confessional Ministerium are committed to separating themselves from the church on the basis of a matter that is not the Gospel. In The Large Catechism, Luther taught that the church, as a creation of the Holy Spirit, lives under the banner of God's grace and forgiveness: "Further we believe that in this Christian community we have the forgiveness of sins, which takes place through the holy sacraments and absolution as well as through all the comforting words of the entire gospel" (LC, Part II, The Third Article: 54, Kolb, Wengert, p. 438). As such, the church is to be a place where "there is full forgiveness of sins, both in that God forgives us and that we forgive, bear with, and aid one another" (LC, Part II, The Third Article: 55, Kolb, Wengert, p. 438). As St. John writes: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

We appeal to all brothers and sisters in Christ to trust that "The Holy Spirit will remain with the holy community or Christian people until the Last Day" (LC, Part II, The Third Article: 53, Kolb, Wengert, p. 438). The church is a gift of the Holy Spirit and, by faith, we trust that the Spirit abides with the ELCIC to this day and into the future as the ELCIC proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people. Along with the reformers who expressed their true desire for unity in the church, we call upon all pastors and congregations to remember that "we are all enlisted under one Christ, we are all to live together in one communion and in one church" (CA Preface: 4, Kolb, Wengert, p.30).

"May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters." Amen. (Galatians 6:18).

Abbreviations:

Ap – The Apology of the Augsburg Confession

CA – CONFESSIO AUGUSTANA (The Augsburg Confession)

FC – The Formula of Concord

LC – The Large Catechism

Sources:

The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000.

Gritsch, Eric W. and Jenson, Robert W., Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings. Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1976.

Luther, Martin. "The Freedom of a Christian" In Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings. Edited by John Dillenberger. Anchor Books: New York, 1962.

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

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# **Augsburg Confessional Theology and the ELCA Sexuality Debate.**

Colleagues,

Today is the 479th anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession in the town of that name to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. That document from 1530 is the magna charta of the Reformation and thereby the yardstick for later groups who call themselves Lutheran. In these postings you've often heard references to the "Augsburg Aha!" Which being summarized is:

1. there is really only one "doctrina" in the Christian faith, namely, the Gospel itself.

2. that Gospel is fundamentally God's promise in Christ crucified and risen to be merciful to sinners from here to eternity.
3. Promises don't "work" unless they are trusted. Therefore "trust alone" [=faith alone] is what brings sinners in and under that promissory mercy.
4. All subsequent "doctrines" in Christian teaching are "articulations" of that promissory core as it impacts the other "articles" of Christian faith and life. E.g., after the Augsburg Aha! you see that the doctrine of the Trinity is a way to talk about God and have it come out as Gospel.
5. From that promissory core comes Augsburg's distinctive hermeneutic: (A) reading the Bible through lenses that distinguish God's word of law from God's word of promise, and (B) reading the world through lenses that distinguish the work of God's legal left hand from the work of God's promising right hand.

When laid alongside this Augsburg Aha! the ELCA sexuality document—coming up for deliberation and decision at the general assembly later this summer—shows that it has other foundations. Not that it denies what's specified above, but that even when articulated in a ten-page opening chapter, it is never used for what then follows.

It starts with "A Distinctly Lutheran Approach," most all of which is Augsburg-authentic. But then after having confessed "the Lutheran tradition," it wanders into a far country and never "uses" that "distinctly" Lutheran approach. I imagine that the folks who created the document do think that they are innocent of this charge, and seek to demonstrate that with their final paragraph on "The Necessity of Mercy, Always." That does sound Augsburgian, true.

But after that opening salute to a Lutheran Approach, the

document does its analysis and builds its conclusions using other lenses, an other hermeneutic, namely, the hermeneutics of contemporary sociological and psychological research. It jumps out at you from the very outline of the document.

After that 10-page opening chapter on A Distinctly Lutheran Approach, sociology and psychology take over. Look at the chapter headings:

- Sexuality and Social Trust
- Sexuality and Social Structures that Enhance Social Trust
- Sexuality and Trust in Relationships
- Sexuality and Social Responsibility
- Conclusion: Human Sexuality and Moral Discernment. The Necessity of Mercy, Always.

These data that then fill out the document are never run through the sieve of all that Lutheran stuff we heard about when we started reading the document, specifically not the Lutheran hermeneutic for “reading the world (of sexuality) through the lenses that distinguish the work of God’s legal left hand from the work of God’s promising right hand.”

So much for the official document right now. I want to focus this ThTh on another document that has followed this official one. Actually there are two of them—each one signed by a large number of big-name theologians and church leaders in the ELCA. One urges the delegates to vote Yes when the document comes up for approval; the other one urges a No vote. If the house is divided among the alleged experts, whom shall the delegates believe?

Sadly, in my judgment, not only the official document, but neither the yea-sayers nor the nay-sayers are using Augsburg’s proposed hermeneutic for reading both the Word and the World as they do their urgings.

Most obvious, so it seems to me, is the voice of the Nay-sayers published just one month ago: "An Open Letter to the Voting Members of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly."

Here's what it says:

*"The proposals are in fact no compromise. The teaching of the church will be changed."The proposals to be considered by the Churchwide Assembly this summer from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality are perceived by some as compromises that will permit the ELCA to live faithfully with internal diversity on controversial ethical questions. The proposals are in fact no compromise. They clearly imply that same-sex blessings and the ordination and rostering of homosexual persons in committed relationships are acceptable within the ELCA. The teaching of the church will be changed. We should not make such an important decision without clear biblical and theological support. The Task Force did not provide such support, nor has it been provided in statements from some of our colleagues in ELCA institutions."*

*[Comment: If –ala Augsburg–there is only one "doctrina" (=teaching), the doctrine of the Gospel, then the nay-sayers need to link this ELCA proposal to that gospel and demonstrate how it undermines (or replaces) Christ's promise as the core offering for sinners to trust. The ELCA document does propose a change in "what we've always said," but if that change does not change the one and only teaching, then it is a "ho-hum" change, a change in practice, which the Augsburg Confessors not only allow, but were actually doing in the church-life of their day. Unless it's "contrary to the Gospel," they said, any new practice was OK.]*

*"Indifference to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church*

*"1. If the assembly adopts the proposed rules of procedure, a*

simple majority of one Churchwide Assembly will alter the moral teaching on sexuality we have shared with the vast majority of the church past and present. We are concerned that such a procedure shows an indifference to the common mind of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church throughout the ages and across cultures. At the least, a two-thirds majority should be required, if indeed the assembly should be voting on these matters at all."

["Moral teaching" and the "doctrine of the Gospel" are not synonyms. In the church's history "shared moral teaching with the vast majority of the church past and present" has NOT been Gospel-grounded. Even worse, some of it has not even been grounded in God's own law of equity justice. "Shared moral teaching past and present" in church history has supported chattel slavery, women's subjugation, apartheid, and homosexual condemnation. "Shared moral teaching" is always up for review. And the first rubrics for measurement of moral teaching and practice according to Augsburg is God's two-edged law of preservation and law of equity justice. Augsburg is even feisty enough to suggest that church people—yes, Gospel-trusters—have no greater insight into such moral matters as do those outside the faith. In fact, God has appointed vast numbers of such outsiders to be guardians of his law of preservation and equity justice. Even more shocking, perhaps, is that Augsburg designates sexuality as a "secular matter," not the church's agenda at all. God's secular magistrates are God's authorized agents for managing the matter, for administering God's preservation and equity-justice agenda in that realm of godly secularity.

On "indifference to the common mind of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church throughout the ages and across cultures," the nay-sayers are not telling us the full story. Marriage and sexual matters have not been characterized by a "common mind"

throughout the ages and across cultures.” Augsburg Lutheranism—because it locates these matters in God’s secular regime—acknowledges and anticipates diversity and difference in the way different cultures with different histories formulate and then carry out God’s preserving and equity-recompensing operations. If polygamy can be (as it is in many an OT story) “godly” practice in the secular realm, then homo-/hetero-practice might conceivably have “godly” variety too.]

“The church is founded on the whole Word of God, both law and gospel

“2. The proposals claim that the ELCA can live with profound differences on sexual questions because our unity is centered exclusively on the gospel and the sacraments. This claim separates law and gospel in a way contrary to both Scripture and the Confessions. The church is founded on the whole Word of God, both law and gospel. The Task Force texts seem to permit variation on all ethical questions, no matter how fundamental. How Christians behave sexually is not a matter of indifference to our life in Christ.”

[Here’s where the nay-sayers depart most obviously from Augsburg’s Aha!—even from Augsburg’s verbatim text. The ELCA proposal is actually quoting the Augsburg Confession when it claims that our ELCA unity is centered exclusively on the Gospel proclaimed and the sacraments administered according to that gospel. To tell us that that affirmation “separates law and gospel in a way contrary to the Scripture and the Confessions” is simply not true. The AC comes to that conclusion about the church’s unity as an explicit articulation of the Gospel-core, God’s free promise in Christ to forgive sinners and render them righteous as they trust that promise.

To claim that this “separates law and gospel” is to talk about



law and gospel in a way that is alien to Augsburg—possibly even worse, a contradiction of what Augsburg means with law and gospel. When the next sentence then tells us: “The church is founded on the whole Word of God, both law and gospel,” we get a clearer picture of the nay-sayers’ intent. Their argument is biblicist. “If it’s in the Bible, you’ve got to believe it and practice it.” And their talk about God’s law and God’s Gospel is not what the Augsburg means when it proposes Law/Gospel as the hermeneutical lenses proposed by the AC for reading the whole Bible. Instead the nay-sayers turn law/gospel into the two major teachings in the Bible. Gospel = Good News for sinners, and Law = rules and regulations for living—also after you become Christ-trusters. And, of course, the “law of God” they are talking about is those texts on homosexuality in both the OT and NT—all of which allegedly say NO on this topic.

Au contraire Augsburg. The church is NOT founded on the Bible and its two major teachings about how sinners are saved and how the saved should behave. The church is founded on the Gospel, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. Claiming the Bible as the cornerstone is the proposal of many a so-called “conservative evangelical” these days. It is however an “other” confession to the one offered at Augsburg. At root it is an “other” Gospel. How could all these signatories not see that? That I cannot comprehend.

The last two lines: “The Task Force texts seem to permit variation on all ethical questions, no matter how fundamental. How Christians behave sexually is not a matter of indifference to our life in Christ.” call for authentic law/promise sifting. THE fundamental ethical issue, the one that creates the Christian ethos, is faith in Christ. This (ueber)fundamental question always HAS TO BE considered when supposed “fundamental” ethical questions arise. For that is THE fundamental ethical question, as Jeff Anderson so brilliantly

articulated in last week's ThTh posting. That is the item that is not "a matter of indifference": to our life in Christ, namely, faith in Christ. Already in the first generation of the church's life-in-Christ there were two HUGE behavioral issues that were finally rendered "indifferent" when measured by the Gospel-core-circumcision for male Christians and meat offered to idols. "Makes no difference" was what "seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," they said.]

"It would damage our ecumenical relationships

"3. If the ELCA were to approve the public recognition of same-sex unions or the rostering of persons in such relationships, it would damage our ecumenical relationships with the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and Evangelical churches, all of which affirm the clear teaching of Scripture that homosexual activity departs from God's design for marriage and sexuality. Furthermore, it would put the ELCA at odds with many of our sister Lutheran churches, especially in Asia and Africa. The United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA) have also recently upheld scriptural teaching on this matter. These bodies have officially recognized that the biblical prohibitions against homosexual activity remain applicable today to consensual sexual relationships between persons of the same sex."

[Ecumenical relationships that "require" more than Augsburg proposes—"consensus in the preaching of the Gospel and administering the sacraments in accord with that gospel"—are requirements that go beyond the true unity of the church. To then affirm "the clear teaching of the Scriptures"—an actually "good " Lutheran phrase—as applicable to the "biblical prohibitions against homosexual activity" departs from what that "clear" phrase has always meant to Augsburg Lutherans, namely, "clear teaching of the Gospel." Even if two of our ELCA

ecumenical partners have affirmed the “nay” position, there are other ecumenical partners who have said the opposite. And for the “big” churches—Roman, Orthodox, Evangelical—has anyone checked if their “nay” is basically biblicistic (which falls under Augsburg-condemnation), or is it genuinely law/Gospel-grounded?]

“Our unity will be fractured”

“4. With regard to calling rostered leaders, the statement proposes “structured flexibility,” which we believe will lead inevitably to “local option.” If adopted, this proposal will mean that the relationship among bishops, candidacy committees, and congregations will become confused and conflicted. Practically speaking, there will be two lists of candidates for rostered leadership in the church. The result will be that not all pastors and congregations will be in full fellowship with each other, nor with many of the pastors and congregations of those denominations with whom we are in full communion. Further, laity seeking a congregation to join would need to ask about which option a congregation has chosen in calling its leaders. Our unity in the office of ministry will be fractured.”

[“Local option” is approved and Gospel-grounded according to the Augsburg Confession: “Uniformity in church customs and practices is not necessary for preserving the unity of the church.” So whose side are these signatories on when they reject it? “Unity” in the office of ministry is normed for Lutherans by Augsburg Article 5. Some ELCA habits may have to change if the ELCA adopts the proposal, but “fracturing” the office of ministry by validating gay clergy? Come now.]

“Conscience can err”

“5. The social statement calls for opponents in the current

controversy to respect each other's "bound conscience," referring to Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms. Luther, however, was not merely claiming that he was sincere about the convictions he held; he asserted rather that his conscience was bound to the Word of God. Conscience can err. The Word of God, not conscience, is the final court of appeal in the church."

[The "Word of God" Luther was talking about at Worms was God's "Good News" word, the Gospel, not the Bible. When he talked about the Bible he most often spoke of "die Schrift," the scriptures. Word of God regularly meant Gospel in his vocabulary.]

Consciences can indeed err. Including the consciences of the signatories of this petition. Including my own. But what I propose here is not conscience-convictions. Instead it's a claim that if the nay-sayers' document, AND the official one to which they are responding, were normed by the Confession presented this day almost 500 years ago, they would be different. Said more bluntly, they would be Lutheran. Which in itself is no big deal. Lutheran, schmutheran! But were they congruent with Augsburg, then they too could claim, as the Augsburgers did at the very end of the confession, to be genuinely catholic and genuinely evangelical.]

"We are deeply sensitive to the need of the church to provide pastoral care for all people. We are aware that there are some in the church who will disagree with this letter. Nevertheless, we feel we are called to support and advocate the biblical teaching on human sexuality and urge you to defeat all the proposals from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality that the Church Council has forwarded to you. We pledge to you our prayers and we invite you to work with us for the renewal of our church under the Word of God."

*[There is no uniform “biblical teaching on human sexuality.” It undergoes variety already throughout the Bible. Lutheran theology expects that, since the whole matter is under the jurisdiction of God’s secular agents. And in the secular realm of God’s old creation there is wide variety in practices and procedure.]*

There are 59 signatures on the copy of this “Vote No” document that I have. Half of them I know. Some of them are good friends. I cannot understand how they could put their names to this statement of dissent and encourage a denomination of the Augsburg Confession to follow their counsel.]

Some years ago I was asked by one of the ELCA synods to speak to this hot potato subject with consciously Augsburg accents. That attempt is archived on the Crossings website. Its title is “Reformation Resources: Law/Gospel Hermeneutics and The Godly Secularity of Sex.” The URL is <https://crossings.org/archive/ed/ReformationResources.pdf>

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **Crossing the Kidney Market – With Law and Promise**

Colleagues,

I recently sent on to you Paul Tambyah’s request for Crossings counsel on new legislation in Singapore that seeks to regulate

the sale of human body parts. Nine of you have already responded, all of it good stuff. So I'm going to pick and choose for today's ThTh posting the one that explicitly takes Tambyah's issue through the classic Crossings paradigm. Jeff Anderson takes the standard six steps of diagnosis and prognosis and at each step follows John 8:1-11 as his GROUNDING text. Then he does a super analysis in TRACKING the reality of human organs as a marketable commodity, and then concludes with CROSSING the Biblical text and the body-parts "text" with each other. I've already sent this on to Paul, and now it comes to you.

When I asked him for permission to pass it on to you, he not only said Yes but added this "very Lutheran" sentence: "I tried (without saying it explicitly) to lay out the difference between our hunger for a Lutheran 'Ethic' and the authentic Lutheran contribution of an 'Ethos.'"

That may sound like "insider trading" among egghead theologians. It is, however, linked to the Augsburg Aha! about Christian ethics. What sinners need is not rules and regulations on how to "do the right thing," but how to become "right" people. That means the quality of our life (that's what ethos means) needs to be changed by the gospel of forgiveness. When our ethos is "right," then our actions (ethics) come out "right" too. Jesus said it more simply: A good tree brings forth good fruit. The gospel is all about creating good trees. And their fruits will follow.

Peace & Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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Dear Ed,

Paul Tambyah's "mine field" could be crossed with John 8:1-11 to

make it a “fertile field” for Christian Ethics. Here are some thoughts:

When I considered the “selling of body parts” I thought immediately of Jesus and the woman “taken in adultery” in the Gospel of John. Although it is not clear from the text, I have always understood her to be a prostitute, that is, one who sells her body, or parts of it, for cash.

In both scenarios, folks turn to the legal system (Mosaic Law or Singapore Law) to solve the problem. Perhaps by crossing Jesus’ encounter in John 8 with Paul Tambyah’s encounter in Singapore, we can find a field, fertile with real Law and, hence, real Good News.

Jeff Anderson

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## BODY PARTS FOR SALE.

Step 1. For Sale, Body Parts – At Odds with One’s Self. “...a woman taken in adultery.”

- A. My first reaction is: “How terrible.” To sell your body (the prostitute), or a part of your body (the Singapore poor) is a sign of inner disintegration. The seller is destroying her own self.
- B. An enlightened observer would add: “How terrible also for the buyer.” The buyers are corrupting their own humanity and demeaning themselves by grasping for transient straws of life by using the other’s body/body parts as an object for their own satisfaction.

Step 2. For Sale, Body Parts – At Odds with One’s Community. “THEY brought to him ...”

- A. The deeper problem indicts the community (i.e. THEY).

THEY, the community, have rules permitting and regulating the traffic in human flesh. THEY believe that “the law of Singapore” like “the law of Moses” can manage this class of mercantile transactions. How kosher!

- B. But beyond the legal issue, a sensitive observer might raise other diagnostic questions: Why is the seller selling his own body in the first place? Is it to have the cash to live another day? Or to put food on the table for her child? Or to buy a few sticks to burn and keep warm? Here we observe a wrenching breakdown of the core “body” in society, the family. Why hasn’t the seller’s family taken her in and warmed and fed her? Why haven’t friends helped her with her dear child?
- C. The tragedy of selling bodies and body parts comes about because the basic societal bodies, community and family, have abandoned their brother and sister. So each is reduced to selling his or her own body or body-parts.
- D. Can our predicament be any worse than that? Yes, it can. Perhaps that is why Jesus doodles in the sand. I think he is giving the body of critics some space to do some theological thinking, and perhaps to come to their senses. They don’t.

Step 3. For Sale, Body Parts – At Odds with God. “Let him who is without sin among you”

- A. Don’t you just wish this were Jesus’ clever way to zap the scribes and Pharisees who had brought the woman to him? So do I. But I think Jesus’ words target a wider audience. Jesus’ critique encompasses all four groups in our little tableau: the sellers of bodies/body-parts, the buyers of bodies/body-parts, the body of law and its proponents (Singapore and Moses and the Pharisees), and the silent or absent bodies of community and family. All four were jockeying for position, trying to turn a practice of human



degradation into something that would give them a little breathing room to live. But the very debate over these ugly undertakings shows them all (us all) to be enemies of God. They are on the wrong side of the God of Life.

- B. The individual human bodies of the buyers as well as the bodies of the sellers were already dying one cell at a time, or one organ at a time, or one more roll in the hay at a time. The communities/organizations/families (collective bodies, all) were dying one more argument at a time, or one more excuse at a time, or one more stoning at a time. Jesus' invitation: "Let him who is without sin among you ..." unmasks them all. They are as good as dead under the gaze of God. Those who are clever try to escape the wrath of God by ducking out quietly. But all of them are withering under God's curse.

Step 4. A New Body – The Body of Jesus – laid down for you.  
"Neither do I condemn you."

*A little twist here. Jesus' non-condemnation is different from the accusers'. The accusers halted their condemnation because they were trembling before God's wrath. Jesus withholds condemnation because he would lay down his body, and all its parts, in a holy way, for her. He was on the way to his glory, being lifted on the cross to endure God's wrath for the sin of the world. Romans is too good to pass up here: "Therefore," says Paul, "there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." What a stunningly different way to use one's body/body-parts. No more buying or selling of body parts, no more stoning or killing or defending of human bodies. Instead, as Jesus says in the other Gospels: "This is my body, given for you." This human body, the dying body of God, becomes a gift for the world and finally stops condemnation in its tracks.*

Step 5. A New Body – The Body of Christ in the World – a new

community. "Go."

- A. That is almost too simple: Go! Go and do what? Sin no more? That is what NOT to do. But what TO DO? Wouldn't it be nice to have some rules – like Singapore or like Moses – to tell us what to do? Whoops, there we are, back in the old mode again, looking for relief by concretizing good and evil in a code.
- B. Part of the diagnosis we saw earlier on was that the buyers and sellers of bodies were locked out of community; and the communities of family and the legal body politic were lethally muddled in defensiveness and self-justification.
- C. Jesus unveils a new community. We call it the body of Christ. It welcomes all sinners. Yet we ask, what do you do in this new body? What is your Ethic? "Go," Jesus says. This is not rocket science, but it still puzzles us anew. Just go, and be what you are. Once you have the God-problem tended to, the rest flows from your being. Go, be my community. You are the community befriended and favored by God. Try that on for size. See where that takes you.

Step 6. A New Body – The Body of Jesus for the World – giving away body parts. I've seen it!

- A. I have seen the body of Christ, alive in a dying world. I have seen a community where people with failing body parts could go to be loved and cherished. I saw this in a beautiful old nunnery, where the aging sisters took in the suffering and the dying and loved them, and prayed for them, and fed them, and held them. This kind of Christian community generated what we know today as the hospice movement. I've seen it with my own eyes: bodies loved, rather than exploited.
- B. My second vision may be a little crazy. It grows out of

our amazing ability to give dying people new organs. We cringe at a poor man selling his kidney to get money, but our hearts are warmed by the man who will give up a kidney to save his twin sister. What if the body of Christ were a community where members could sign up to donate organs to non-relatives, even to strangers. Not to sell them, mind you, but to give their body parts as a gift so that another might live. As I say, that is a little crazy. But it might just happen in the body of Christ. It is just an inkling of what might transpire when the fear of death is conquered, and the grasping for more is sated, and the cloud of wrath is laid to rest. Have you ever had a vision like that? Tell us about it.

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## **Some Luther Quotes for the Feast of the Holy Trinity**

Colleagues:

[We're still in the afterglow of Bishop Francisco Claver's visit last week. Steve Kuhl, who had just reviewed Claver's book for you (ThTh #572), was here for some of the time. Much of the fun for those of us gathered around was "just listening" to the two of them conduct a Lutheran-Catholic dialog on THE MAKING OF A LOCAL CHURCH. In an email just received Claver tells me: "I'll be writing a comment on Steve's review when I'm free and I'll send it to you when it's done. Nothing much different from what we spoke of there." When it comes to us, we'll pass it on to you. And then maybe Steve's thoughts about those conversations too.]

For this week, still in the octave of the Feast of the Holy Trinity, some bons mots from Luther on that topic.

Excerpted from the devotional booklet "Day by Day We Magnify Thee," pp. 227, 228, 229.

From a sermon on John 3:

*"The other feasts in the year wrap our Lord up in the works and wonders which He has done. At Christ's nativity we celebrate that God was made Man, at Easter that He rose from the dead, at Whitsun that He poured out the Holy Ghost and instituted the Church, and so forth, so that all the other feasts of the year speak of our Lord God as He is seen clothed in some work. But this feast shows us how God is in Himself, in His divine nature without any wrappings and works. Here you must soar high above all reason, leaving all creatures far below, and must swing yourself up and listen only to what God says of Himself, and of His innermost being. In no other way can we know this. And there God's folly and the world's wisdom clash."Therefore we should not dispute about how it can be that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are One God, for it is by its very nature beyond all reason, but it should be enough for us that God speaks thus about Himself and reveals Himself thus in His Word.*

*"This is a strengthening message, and it should make our hearts joyful towards God. For we see that all three Persons, the whole Godhead, turns Himself to us in order that we poor wretched people should be helped against sin, death, and the devil, that we may be brought to justification, the Kingdom of God, and eternal life."*

From The Bondage of the Will:

*"This hidden Will should not be investigated but adored, with trembling, as a deep, holy secret of God's High Majesty, which He has reserved to Himself." Thus we must not search God's nature and His hidden will. For therein we have nothing to do with Him, nor does He desire to have anything to do with us. God is at work in many ways which He does not reveal to us in His Word. Likewise He has many intentions which he has not revealed to us in His Word. Therefore we should behold the Word and leave the unfathomable Will alone, for we have received no command about it. For we must direct ourselves in accordance with His Word and not with His unfathomable Will. It behooves us not to seek the high, great, holy secrets of the Majesty who dwells in a light which no one can approach, as Paul says (1 Timothy 6). We should cleave unto God who permits us to draw near to Him, and to Him who was made man, Jesus Christ the crucified (as St. Paul says), in whom are hidden all the treasures of God's wisdom. For in Him we have superabundantly received all things which we know and which it behooves us to know."*

#### **From Table-Talk:**

*"Why then do we poor wretched people rack our brains over the nature of God, while we yet fail to grasp by faith the rays of the divine promises or comprehend a spark of God's commands and works, both of which He has confirmed with words and mighty works?" Of a truth, we ought to teach of God's unsearchable and unfathomable Will, but to take upon ourselves to understand it is a very dangerous thing, through which we may stumble and break our neck. It is my habit to restrain and direct myself by the word which the Lord Christ spoke to Peter: 'What is that to you? Follow me.' For Peter also disputed and brooded over the works of God, asking in what manner He would deal with another, that is, what might befall John. And again, how He answered*

*Philip when He said (John 14:8): 'Show us the Father,' what did He reply? 'Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.'* For Philip, too, was anxious to behold the Majesty and Presence of the Father. And again, even if we knew all these hidden judgments of God, of what use and benefit could it be to us over and above the command and promise of God?

*"Yet over and above all things practice faith in God's promises and in the works of His commandments."*

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What Luther says in these three citations signals several things. 1) The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is most of all doxology—"not to be investigated, but adored." 2) Trinitarian theology is adoration language for speaking about God and have it come out as Gospel, Good News indeed to be adored.. 3) The fundamental difference between Christian trinitarianism and all forms of undifferentiated monotheism is just that: speaking of God in a way that comes out as Good News." This is clearly the case with the monotheism of Islam. The confession of Allah as both just and merciful in the Koran is "iffy" Gospel at best. You simply have to do something to trigger Allah's mercy. And Judaism too with a Messiah not-yet-arrived, has "not yet" a means for coping with the one and only God there is, who continues to "count trespasses," as one Jesus-era Israelite said. Or in the language of the Hebrew scriptures, who continues "to visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of commandment-breakers."

And then finally this one from Luther's Large Catechism, which gave me my first clue that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a proposal for "how to talk about God and have it come out sheer Gospel."

Book of Concord (Tappert edition p.419:63-65)

*“In these three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love. He created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father’s favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father’s heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.” [Note the sequence reversal. The confession goes “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” but in our life with God the order is reversed: Holy Spirit brings us to Christ and Christ brings us back to the God as Abba-father, no longer terrible Judge.]*

Which leads to Luther’s final note about the Gospel-emptiness of “Christ-less” monotheisms.

Tappert p.419:66

*“These articles of the Creed, therefore, divide and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside the Christian church, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God, nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing. Therefore they remain in eternal wrath and damnation, for they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”*

In ecumenical conversations with missiologists where I have cited this paragraph, objections regularly arise about that “wrath and damnation for those who do not have the Lord Christ.” Can it really be that bad for those who are “outside the Christian church”? Yet is that any more severe than God “visiting iniquities” in that ancient contract at Mount Sinai referenced above? Or is that any more grim than the closing words in chapter 3 of John’s gospel – that same chapter with the famous John 3:16 “God so loved the world” passage at the center of it – “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not listen to the Son will not see life, but must endure God’s wrath”?

But thanks be to God whose trinitarian self-disclosure is sheer gospel!

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder