

God's Facebook and the Other One

Hark, TIME's year-end cover sings
"Zuckerberg is king of kings."
His FACEBOOK now makes us able
To undo the Tower of Babel.

Joyful, from all nations rise,
Linked as friends through cyber skies.
Near one billion at his fountain
["Zuckerberg" means sugar-mountain!]

But with his sugar can you cook
Recipes from God's Facebook?

I'm doubtful. I speak from hands-on ignorance—I'm not (yet) in the club, so far as I know. But I have worked through TIME's 24-page(!) cover story, cum many "faces." Zuckerberg's messaging cited there has a messianic ring. Is he promoting an alternate Messiah to the one who came via a manger? His own words, as cited by TIME, even have a clearly Hebrew-Bible messianic ring. Which is no surprise, since that is his heritage. The TIME article describes his outer-space Bar Mitzvah celebration not too many years ago.

What is Zuckerberg up to? "'We're trying to map out what exists in the world. In the world, there's trust. I think as humans we fundamentally parse the world through the people and relationships we have around us. So at its core, what we're trying to do is map out all of those trust relationships, which you can call . . . friendships.' He calls this map the social graph and it's a network of an entirely new kind."

Map out what exists in the world
Trust relationships—ALL of them.
A network of an entirely new kind

If that's not a messiah's agenda—the whole world, the human heart, a new human community—what is?

Yet, that wouldn't necessarily make Mark Zuckerberg a competitor to the Mangled Messiah, would it? All depends. Just how "soteriological" is the Facebook agenda? How much salvation? What all gets saved? What doesn't?

Just for fun, let's take Mark Zuckerberg's family name as the goal of the Facebook project. Mark is trying to get "what exists in the world" to a sugar-mountain, where "trust relationships (ALL of them)" are mountaintop sweet. Call it friendship. That is indeed a network of a new kind, a new map of what exists in the world. In the Hebrew scriptures that's called return from exile, coming home to the promised land. In the Christian gospels, that sounds like the kingdom of God.

But how do you get to that sugar mountain? To say it point-blank, Zuckerberg offers to lead us to the promised land via Sinai mountain. Au contraire, the Mangled Messiah's offer comes via Calvary mountain. Not only is the mountain route on the road-maps different, but the sugar-mountains at the end of the road are two different mountains. So it seems to me.

Is that what's really going on behind the face of Facebook? Well, consider this. Both offers make the same claim:

Map out what exists in the world
Trust relationships—ALL of them.
A network of a new kind

And, how in my head did this come to pass? Well, a funny thing

happened on the way to Christmas Day worship at our Bethel Lutheran congregation here in St. Louis this past Saturday. I'd been asked to be the homilist for the liturgy. Together with our parish musician, Steve Mager, we'd worked out "something a bit different." We were going to focus the homily on the carol "Hark, the herald angels sing." We'd dug into its history. Text by Charles Wesley 1739. Originally ten verses of four lines each and no "herald angels" in the original first line. Instead "Hark, how all the welkin rings," What's "welkin"? We had to find out. The tune we all know is by Felix Mendelssohn (Lutheran Christian with famous Jewish family roots) 1840. Composed by Mendelssohn NOT for this carol, but for a cantata he wrote to honor the 400th anniversary of Gutenberg's movable-type printing press in 1440. [Those three staccato notes in the tune were sung with exclamatory gusto to the syllables: Gu-ten-berg.]

And to make Wesley's poetry fit the Mendelssohn tune, you need 8-line stanzas. So someone scissored and pasted. 10 verses become 5 verses, and then, sadly, the five get shortened to 4 in the "old" Missouri Synod hymnbook and now only three in the hymnal in our pews. And super-sad is that the gutsiest verses messaging Wesley's Christmas gospel theology disappear as the text shrinks.

Here was the plan for Christmas Day. We'd have all ten original verses printed in the worship folder. My homily would announce that Wesley's original message would be the sermon for the day. And my part would be to walk/talk through his 10-verse proclamation and link it to us. Steve would google up an earlier tune, possibly the original from 1739. [He did find one in the 1863 "Episcopal Hymnal for Sunday Schools."] The choir would sing the first 8 verses to that tune and then we'd all join in for the last two, and I would then homilize. So I worked on the Wesley text. First two verses = his retelling the shepherd/angels part of Luke's Christmas story. In the next four

he's doing the "depth theology" of what all was going on, the cosmic story, the big story behind that shepherds-and-messengers encounter. Yes, in those four verses, "a new map of what exists in the world," but I didn't know that phrase yet.

And in the final four verses, we become the speakers, addressing the Manged Messiah ourselves. "Thee, thy, thine" 7 times. "Us, ours" 6 times.

All that Steve and I had worked out did indeed happen, BUT two days before Christmas, neighbor and colleague Fred Danker tosses his copy of TIME's "Person of the Year" issue on our table. "Preachers should not open their mouths until they've read this." Fred didn't know that that was to be my job in his/our congregation on Christmas Day. As if I didn't have enough to do already. Well, if Fred Danker says something is a "you've gotta," then you'd better pay attention. But I didn't get to it on Dec. 24, so at 5 a.m. on the 25th I did. And that became the context for our waltzing with Wesley at Bethel Lutheran congregation on Christmas day in the morning.

Something like this:

Wesley's original text.

1. Hark, how all the welkin rings,
 "Glory to the King of kings;
 Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
 God and sinners reconciled!"
2. Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
 Join the triumph of the skies;
 Universal nature say,
 "Christ the Lord is born to-day!"
3. Christ, by highest Heaven ador'd,
 Christ, the everlasting Lord:
 Late in time behold him come,

- Offspring of a Virgin's womb!
4. Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate deity!
Pleased as man with men to appear,
Jesus! Our Immanuel here!
 5. Hail, the heavenly Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Risen with healing in his wings.
 6. Mild He lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die;
Born to raise the sons of earth;
Born to give them second birth.
 7. Come, Desire of nations, come,
Fix in us thy humble home;
Rise, the woman's conquering seed,
Bruise in us the serpent's head.
 8. Now display thy saving power,
Ruined nature now restore;
Now in mystic union join
Thine to ours, and ours to thine.
 9. Adam's likeness, Lord, efface;
Stamp Thy image in its place.
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in thy love.
 10. Let us Thee, though lost, regain,
Thee, the life, the inner Man:
O! to all thyself impart,
Form'd in each believing heart.

Verses 1 and 2 are Wesley retelling Luke 2:8-20.

"Hark!" Listen up! Pay attention.

Not angels are doing the heralding, but the "welkin," the heavens [German parallel term Wolken, the clouds] are ringing

bells to get our attention. Curious how the “herald angels” got into the text. [I never found out.] Wesley never mentions them in any of the ten verses. It is the welkin, the rooftop of the cosmos, that is doing the messaging. Messenger, of course, is the nickel-word meaning of “angel” in both Hebrew and Greek throughout the Bible. No celestial feather-friend—only rare references to wings. But in every case, God’s designated messenger with a message that always comes with a Hark! Pay attention. Listen up. John the Baptist is called “angelos” in the gospels for just this reason. Camel-skin, not feathers, was his cover-fabric.

It’s all about message. When I was a kid “message” was only a noun. Now it’s also a verb, an action. And that may not be all bad, for messages shape our lives. Zuckerberg is right, Biblically right: messages create trust relationships. They also create the very opposite. Words have power. For good or ill, we live from messages. That’s Biblical too.

When Bob Bertram preached the ordination sermon for our Bethel pastor Bill Yancey, his title was “The Message Makes the Messenger.” Well, “the message also makes the messagee,” the ones receiving the message. That is, it does if you hearken, listen up, to the message. For “hearkening” is the way into the human heart. The message you hang your heart on is the message that makes you you. So straight from the heavens (no more mysterious than cyberspace) comes a message. With the “hark! stay on message, this message.” “Peace, mercy, reconciled”—all this from the “welkin.” Better yet, peace, mercy, reconciled WITH the One who is the Lord of that welkin and on earth. And Joy and Triumph for “all ye” (us) to join. Universal nature (whatever Wesley may have had in mind with those words, but it’s clearly cosmic) keeps telegraphing the message. Hark. Pay attention. Listen up! To what’s happening in Bethlehem. Verse two concludes: “Christ the Lord is born to-day!” OK, how does

that birthing get us to the sugar-mountaintops of "Peace, mercy, reconciled"?

Thought you'd never ask. Now Wesley takes over the messenger role. Verses 3,4,5,6. He spells out what that word LORD means if/when the Manged Messiah is one's Lord. We need to remember: the word LORD doesn't mean boss; it means owner. Ownership restoration is under way throughout the welkin and the earth. Cosmic stuff. And you're part of that cosmos.

Verse 3. Here's who this infant is. THE owner showing up. Yes, "late in time," but nevertheless now come via a most unexpected birth canal. Even with that exclamation point (!) he's the one to behold. So not only hearken with your ears, but look with your eyes.

Verse 4. "Veiled" not only in such an un-royal maternity ward, but beginning here all the way to Mt Calvary. And hidden under that humanity, sub cruce tecta (as Luther liked to say: covered under the cross) is the deity in our skin. Not stuck in our flesh, but "pleased" to be there. Our God-WITH-us is our God-ONE-of-us.

Verse 5. It's about healing. [Note who has the wings!] Peace, Righteousness, Life, Light. All of these are God-connection terms. God-friendship restored.

Verse 6. What needs healing is humankind's congenital birth-defect. The absence of all those God-friendship terms above. The congenital birth defect we all carry is that we are born to die. Needed is a raising, a resurrection from that no-exceptions birth defect. The Manged Messiah, like us with our own kind of death-marked birthing, has himself a double birthing. In Bethlehem from Mary, in eternity from the Father. In that combo of double-birthing he effects our raising. Call it a "second" birth. A life restored, now from God's own DNA, that, as this

Jesus later will say, is one that “though you die (from that first-birth’s defect), yet you shall live.” Yes, that is the wild claim emanating from Bethlehem.

In verses 7,8,9, and 10 Wesley gives us our lines for response. All four verses have us doing what the shepherds did at the end of the Lukan story: “Glorifying and praising God for all that they had seen and heard.” Note well that very last word: “heard.” It started with “hark” and it ends with “heard.” They got the message. They were hanging their hearts on it. They HEARD it. From “heard” to “heart” is only a one-letter shift. Interestingly enough, the shepherds thereby take over the original job the welkin-messengers had as the story began. “Glorifying and praising,” you may remember, was what the “angeloi” were doing. So Wesley brings us into that band of angels, transforming us into messengers ourselves. And what does he have us say?

7. Come, Desire of nations, come,
Fix in us thy humble home;
Rise, the woman’s conquering seed,
Bruise in us the serpent’s head.

Come, Lord Jesus. Do ownership transfer with us. Casa mea, casa sua. My home, your home. Let that ancient gospel-promise from Genesis 3 come true for us. The serpent is not just “out there,” but has residence within us as well. Do your home-ownership transaction with us.

8. Now display thy saving power,
Ruined nature now restore;
Now in mystic union join
Thine to ours, and ours to thine.

Do it now. Apart from our original divine DNA, what’s “natural” for us is still ruined nature. Join us to your rescue operation.

Give us a new “natural.” Your “natural.”

9. Adam’s likeness, Lord, efface;
Stamp Thy image in its place.
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in thy love.

Re-image us. Note the word “efface.” In the Facebook operation of the Mangled Messiah, old faces are swapped for new faces. Give us, Lord, a new face, from your very own facebook. What a sweet swap that is. Not at all just “saving face,” but swapping faces. Getting a saved-face to replace the Adamic one where the serpent’s “nature” also shows up on our face. Don’t just show us YOUR face. STAMP it (feisty verb) on us in your face-swapping.

10. Let us Thee, though lost, regain,
Thee, the life, the inner Man:
O! to all thyself impart,
Form’d in each believing heart.

Let this sweet-swap, this move to your sugar-mountain happen not only to us, but to all. It’s all about what’s going on in the inner self, the heart. That’s where believing/unbelieving happen. Not in the head, but the heart. It’s all about heart and hearken and heard.

The message your heart hearkens to and hears makes you who you are. The first Christmas messengers, Wesley, and in these last verses we ourselves have stayed on this message. Peace, mercy, reconciled. That’s the Bethlehem offer. It claims to map out what exists in the world. To heal trust relationships—ALL of them—beginning with the ruined one at the root of all trust-relationships. [If only Zuckerberg would have thechutzpah to transmit the message for fixing THAT one!] It claims to create a network of an entirely new kind.

With the offer comes the invitation: Hang your heart here.

That's, sortuv, how the homily went. There were more ad lib references to the TIME magazine story. For the hymn of the day following the homily the congregation made Wesley's words their own (in the abbreviated version in our hymnal) sung to Mendelssohn's melody.

For next week's post I ask you colleagues who are Facebook insiders to join the conversation. Can Zuckerberg's friendship-messianism be baptized for the Manged Messiah's purposes? Even if he may have messianic pretensions with his creation, does that necessarily spill over to folks when they sign up? It's happened before that a messiah's followers didn't actually go where he sought to lead them. Is there wiggle-room on Facebook? Does Marshall McLuhan's famous adage about television decades ago, "the medium IS the message," apply to Facebook too? Is there an implicit message—a gospel, even—in the very medium, even apart from any Zuckerberg-hype, that has already supplanted Luke's Christmas gospel?

How about that primal focus on trust-relationships? Can human trust-relationships flourish if the God-distrust relationship (Augsburg Confession, Art.2) isn't fixed first? What sort of sugar-mountain do you get to via Sinai-mountain's second table (social-network-friendship big time!) when you ignore the first table (primal friendship big-time)? I invite Facebook insiders to send me your prose to help compose next week's posting.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Schleiermacher's Theology of Christmas

Colleagues,

For this week's posting Matt Becker of Valparaiso University reviews a newly published edition of Schleiermacher's 200-year-old classic on Christmas. For some of you this may be the first time you ever saw the name Schleiermacher. And even those who have seen it may still wonder how to pronounce it. ["Schlei" is English "shy" with an "l" in it. So "shly." "-macher" is "ma" (as in calling your mother) and then a guttural "ch" to make "khur." Schleiermacher literally = "veil-maker."] Theology students have to know about Schleiermacher—at least in my student days they had to—for reasons Matt spells out below. So even if this is the first time you've seen his name, let Matt get you acquainted. In some places Schleiermacher's path goes deep into the woods, but hang on to Matt's hand and you'll not get lost. He knows the territory. He knows where he's going—and where he wants us to arrive..

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

**Friedrich Schleiermacher. Christmas Eve
Celebration: A Dialogue**

Edited and Translated by Terrence N. Tice.

**Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2010 (Amazon price
\$18.00)**

For those who were classically trained in the Missouri Synod (or almost classically trained; I graduated from Concordia Seminary,

St. Louis, in 1988) and who stayed awake during Dogmatics 101, 102, and 103, where the main textbook was either Franz Pieper's Christian dogmatics or J. T. Mueller's compendium, there was no one worse among the heterodox theologians than Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Pieper even had a label for him and his ilk: "Ich-theologe," which is probably best rendered as "self-centered theologian" or "theologian of the self." Pieper accused Schleiermacher and those influenced by him, such as the Lutheran Johannes von Hofmann (1810-1877), of substituting the subjective views of the "theologizing subject" for the sole "objective authority of Scripture."

In Pieper's view, as soon as one gives up the divinely-inspired and inerrant Bible and replaces it with something else, such as the theologian's own religious self-consciousness, then it will naturally follow that eventually the vicarious atonement of Christ will be replaced by something else as well. "Now, since Christ is always right, Schleiermacher, Hofmann, Frank, and all who employ their method, all who ask the 'Christian subject' to furnish independently of the Word of Christ full assurance or, at least half assurance, are in error. Their theological method is not Christian but unchristian" (Franz Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 vols. [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950-53], 1:115). Strong words, indeed. Of course another, much more famous theologian was just beginning to set forth his critique of Schleiermacher and the liberal theological tradition he inaugurated, when Pieper's words were written in the 1920s. [Ed. Insiders know this theologian was Karl Barth.]

While I had my doubts about Pieper's view of the Bible, the world, and theology already in seminary (who wouldn't, given that he doubted the verity of the Copernican Theory and thought that Einstein's theories of relativity would eventually vindicate a geo-centric biblical cosmology?!), I did not have sufficient time then to study Schleiermacher for myself. That

study came later, especially when I participated in the year-long dogmatics seminar at the University of Chicago that was taught by perhaps the leading Schleiermacher scholar of his generation, Dr. Brian Gerrish. This was one of the great intellectual experiences of my life.

While the ultimate goal of the seminar was to develop a contemporary summary of the Christian faith, the means by which we did this involved very close readings of Schleiermacher's 1821 "Glaubenslehre" ("The Christian Faith") and Calvin's 1559 "Institutes." (The syllabus recommended that we work with the original languages as much as possible.) As a result of these investigations I came to conclude that Pieper's view of the so-called "father of liberal Protestantism" was at least partly wrong. I also came to appreciate Schleiermacher's attempt to restate the content of the faith in the post-Kantian world that was nineteenth-century Prussia, even if I also was convinced I had to depart from his own conclusions at several key points.

If I had to recommend a place to begin the study of Schleiermacher, I would not direct a student to the famous second speech of the 1799 "Speeches on Religion," which is where many are first told to go. [Ed. The full title was "Speeches on Religion addressed to Religion's Cultured Despisers." Here he sought to show the intelligentsia of the burgeoning "Enlightenment" of his day that their disdain of religion brought with it a sacrifice of the "secular" intelligence they so highly prized.] Instead, I would send that person to the slim volume that I have been asked to review here, "Christmas Eve Celebration," which is just under 90 pages in length. As my teacher Dr. Gerrish told us, "This is quintessential Schleiermacher in both thought and style." It is the closest the Reformed theologian ever came to writing the novel that his friends had wanted him to write. (He was close to several in the "Sturm und Drang" movement and lived for a short

time with the creative writer, F. Schlegel.)

Terrance Tice, himself a long-time major scholar of Schleiermacher's life and work, has done a masterful job of bringing together both the 1806 and 1826 editions. His translation is generally good, and his notes are excellent. This is now the single best place to start one's reading of the famous Berliner (or refresh oneself, if it has been awhile since one has read the "Reden" or the "Glaubenslehre").

Written in the three weeks before Christmas 1805, when the bachelor theologian was apparently experiencing some intense feelings about the celebration of Christmas, he intended the work as a Christmas gift for his friends. Set in the form of a dialogue, the story centers on a Christmas celebration in a typical middle-class German home. Through the dialogue the author hoped to evoke a mood or feeling of Christmas joy in the reader. I have to say that the booklet does give one a sentimental view into a by-gone era, especially if one has romantic sympathies to begin with. (As I re-read the dialogue today I couldn't help but think back to the Christmases I've celebrated with my family in southwestern Germany. The book does capture a Christmas mood that one can still experience today, perhaps in a "Christkindlmarkt" [Ed. a street market in Germany associated with the celebration of Christmas during the four weeks of Advent. Literally: Christ-child-market.] or in the warm and inviting home of friends before a Valpo Christmas concert...)

After descriptions of the main activities on a typical German Christmas Eve, such as singing songs, opening gifts, the initial banter of friendly conversation, and sharing the latest family news, the focus shifts to a more serious set of issues. First there is a discussion about the nature of music itself. In keeping with the author's own love of music (this was the era of Beethoven), one of the gathered guests suggests that music is a

more basic means of expressing the essence of religion than the spoken word. This idea is considered for a short time until the very precocious young Sophie steals the scene and directs the reader toward childlike Christmas simplicity and spontaneity. This is the second movement, if you will, of a kind of musical dialectic that goes from elemental feeling ("Gefuehl") through childlike naivete and on to... "feminine nature."

Yes, that's right. All is leading toward the "feminine mystique," ala Schleiermacher's version of it. Here, in the middle portions of the dialogue, he slowly reveals that for him "the feminine" presents the clearest picture of what religion in general is all about and what Christianity in particular is all about. For him, romantic that he was, women had a distinct advantage over men because of their intuition, that is, their ability to intuit "the heart of the matter," to get beyond cold rationalizing and to stress warm emotion. Women, thus, are a perfect example of the nature of religion, which is a matter of feeling, mood, and intuition—and most definitely not a matter of knowledge, praxis, ethics, or outdated doctrines.

Apparently Schleiermacher once admitted that he would have rather been born a woman than a man. Make of that what you will, he was a sensitive fellow. Unlike Luther, who rather reluctantly married Katie (and only because nobody else would have her), Schleiermacher wanted to marry. Unfortunately, the woman he truly wanted to marry, the woman whom he loved, was already married to a Lutheran pastor, and unhappily so. (This woman seems to have served as the model for the hostess in the dialogue.) All of this was in the background when he set out to write his little Christmas gift. It is not too far afield to think that he was likely projecting his own lonely-hearted romantic longings into this fictional middle-class Christmas party.

When the male guests begin discussing critical questions about the sources for the historical Jesus, casting doubt on their reliability, and wondering about the real meaning of the historical Jesus for redemption, the party takes a turn for the worse. In fact, the men almost totally destroy the mood that had been created by the children and women. As the men are arguing and debating among themselves, a late-comer, Josef, flatly refuses to join them in their critical discussion. For him Christmas is taking part in "every little happening and amusement I have come across. I have laughed, and I have loved it all. It was one long affectionate kiss that I have given to the world, and now my enjoyment with you shall be the last impress on my lips, for you know that you are the dearest of all to me. Come, then, and above all bring the child, if she is not yet asleep, and let me see your glories, and let us be glad and sing something pious ['frommes'; Tice translates this as 'religious'] and joyful" (87). And this is how the Christmas party ends, at the piano, with hearts full of joy, and a pious sentimentality infusing the "Gemuetlichkeit."

For Schleiermacher the task of Christian theology is to reflect critically upon the kind of Christian piety that is displayed in the "Christmas Eve" dialogue. Indeed, the dialogue form is essential to the work. For just as in Plato's dialogues, which Schleiermacher had begun translating and editing the year before the "Christmas Eve", whatever truth is under discussion only emerges through the entire dialectic of the dialogue itself. In other words, no one person in the conversation or scene has a complete purchase on the truth; each contributes something to the larger whole. (Schleiermacher would eventually complete his edition of Plato's dialogues four years later. We tend to forget that for a generation he was the leading scholar of Plato's philosophy in Germany.)

In the case of the "Christmas Eve" dialogue, the essence of

Christmas emerges as a dialectical movement through nonverbal music, the naivete of the spontaneously free and uninhibited child, the intuition of the woman, the joy and love of the pietist AND the critical-historical analysis of the men. But the latter rational analysis is clearly subordinated within the larger contexts of the former elements.

David F. Strauss (1808-74), who at one time attacked Schleiermacher's Irenaean Christology for its mythical, non-historical foundations, once noted that the content of Schleiermacher's "Glaubenslehre" is just one dogma, namely, the person of Christ. If the Berliner's picture of Jesus, the Savior, made popular in the Moravian piety of his youth, was no longer viable after his university's studies, a new picture emerged for him in the wake of a kind of "second naivete" (to use the much later language of Ricoeur) that followed a second religious conversion. While the piety of his youth was never totally jettisoned, by the time of the "Speeches" he had become, as he told his Reformed chaplain father, "a Moravian of a higher order," that is, a Christian who sought to hold piety and critical-historical-philosophical understanding together in a single whole.

Strauss didn't think this was possible: either history or faith. Feuerbach would also level similar criticism: If theology is simply about analyzing pious self-consciousness, even a collective consciousness in the historic church, who is to say that the object of theology is not a projection based on one's needs, a fiction, a product of one's imagination, and not something that has any real basis in historical facts?

One of the guests, Leonard, speaks for all skeptics. A pleasant-enough fellow, he nonetheless notes how miraculous it is that so many people believe things about Jesus that serious historical scholarship has concluded are unlikely or even absurd. The

gospels contradict each other and contain the most outlandish stories, and yet believers go on believing despite the contradictions and the fantastic claims.

In response to Leonard's historical skepticism, two other male guests ignore his historicism and point in another direction: what must be the actual source of the Christian piety that is celebrated at Christmas? The only source for that must be the actual person of the Redeemer himself. So who must Jesus the Christ be if he is to have this effect? First, he must have the quality of being an "ideal type" ("Urbildlichkeit"), that is, he must be more than a mere moral example to follow but a truly perfect human being (Irenaeus's "Second Adam," following Romans 5) who also has a perfect sense of God, a perfect God-consciousness, which Schleiermacher further defines as "a veritable being of God in him" (which is his rather weak way of asserting Christ's divinity).

Second, the Redeemer must also have the quality of being able to evoke this ideal in others ("Vorbildlichkeit"), that is, he must be able to communicate his perfect God-consciousness to others. Christ works on his followers in such a manner that they are drawn into the circle of his sinless perfection. This faith is transmitted down through time under the power of his personal influence in his historical community, the church. This sinless perfection of Jesus, his absolutely potent God-consciousness, radiates from his historic life and creates and sustains the new community he founded.

"Is Schleiermacher right? Is it the case that if Christians look into themselves, what they find is an influence of Jesus that is at once similar to the experience they have of strong personalities and yet unique in coming from a sense of God to which they know no parallel? Is this, further, a sufficient point of departure for a theological estimate of Christ's

person? And how well has Schleiermacher answered...the intellectual difficulties posed for Christology by the Age of Reason? The questions remain" (Brian Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church* [Fortress, 1984], 50).

Perhaps both Feuerbach and Pieper (now there's a combination!) were partly right about Schleiermacher. His theology is open to the charge of creative invention and a lack of sufficient attention to historical details. The Christ of his piety seems so removed from the apostolic Christ, whose witness isn't quite "history" but neither is it "fiction." Whether we like it or not, the gospel witness is a historical "mixed bag," but that's ok, since that's all we have. What counts, finally, is the historic import and impact of those deeds and words that were seen and heard and interpreted by the apostolic witnesses and passed on through their proclamation, liturgies, sacramental acts, and lives.

Despite the greatness, yes, even the genius, of Schleiermacher, despite the historic importance of the liberal evangelical tradition he began, and despite the fact that every future Christian theologian will continue to have to wrestle with him and his life's work, his Christology and Soteriology come up short when measured against the prophetic and apostolic witnesses to Jesus. To interpret Christ's work in terms of the communication of his perfect God-consciousness is to minimize the historical particularities included within that apostolic witness to the redemption accomplished through Christ. In contrast to Schleiermacher's Jesus, who is a kind of romantic, religious virtuoso, the prophets and apostles witness to a Christ who is lowly, non-docetic, undignified, one whom God made to be sin for us (Second Cor. 5:21), one who truly dies God-damned on the cross, one who screams out, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" Without these elements, Christmas just doesn't mean that much.

Schleiermacher's "Christmas Eve" is a great sentimental gift for Christmas, maybe better even than Dickens' ghost story. It is also its own kind of witness to a most important era in Christian theology. One can learn a great deal from Schleiermacher and wrestling with him.

But as a witness to the Christ of Christmas this "Celebration" is too purified, too clean, too refined, too neat and tidy, finally, too rosy. The messy, crying baby in the smelly straw, the one who spits up his mother's milk, who vomits his food, who fouls his drawers, who lovingly aches, suffers, bleeds, and eventually saves us from our sins by dying on the cross—that's all missing. If you want that kind of Christmas story, better to turn to one by my friend and colleague, Walter Wangerin Jr.

Matthew Becker
Valparaiso University
Valparaiso, Indiana
Christmas 2010

Christian Buddhist, Buddhist Christian?

Colleagues,

In some Asian countries Jesus' birthday (December 25) and Buddha's birthday (the 8th day of the 4th month of the Chinese lunar calendar)—both of them—are national holidays. In such places Buddhists and Christians often "cross the aisle" to participate in their neighbors' celebrations. Which may be a bit of a stretch to warrant my posting this Buddhist/Christian item

just before this year's Christian celebration of Jesus' birth. Even so, here it is.

Kenneth Dobson has posted on ThTh pages before on Christian-Buddhist themes. Most recently with a two-part essay now archived on the Crossings website: www.crossings.org/thursday/2008/thur102308.shtml and www.crossings.org/thursday/2008/thur103008.shtml

Ken and I met years ago when he was pastor at the Presbyterian congregation across the Mississippi River in Alton, Illinois. For a long time now he's been in Thailand mostly in academic posts. He was host for Marie and me a while back when we were there too. Now for some time Ken works at Payap University "up north" in Chiang Mai. [Google the name to learn more: E.g., "established in 1974, a private institution founded by the Church of Christ in Thailand."]

So Ken was the obvious one to ask to review Paul Knitter's book with the provocative title: "Without Buddha I Could Not be a Christian." Knitter is a major and multi-published Roman Catholic voice in world-religions dialogue. But also not without dissent from his own RC colleagues. Here's what Ken has to say about Knitter's claim that Buddha is the one who keeps him celebrating Christmas.

Peace and Joy!
Ed Schroeder

Paul F. Knitter
Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian
Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2009.

(Amazon price \$15.61)

I slogged along through the foundational three chapters of Paul Knitter's painstaking rehearsal of his attempt to stay Christian by utilizing insights he had acquired from Mahayana and Zen Buddhism. There was so much of it that was irrelevant to me, or that disappointed me that I threatened to quit even though I am a struggling Christian who is surviving in a Buddhist sea. I had hoped to find a kindred spirit and possibly a guru because we are both Illinois boys within a few months of each other in age and both have Buddhist-Christian orientations, and Paul Knitter commands a lot of respect in Buddhist-Christian dialogue circles. I kept on hoping right up to the chapter on Nirvana and Heaven. That's where I knew that we weren't going to find common ground after all, and it's where it began to dawn on me why.

The bottom line is that Paul Knitter wants to initiate a new form of Christian theologizing and my hope is for an expanded form of Buddhism. Knitter's confession is that coming to terms with Buddhism has helped him mend his fabric of faith in Christianity, and my fabric hasn't been critically damaged.

My first critique of Knitter's book is that it is eclectic in its selection of Buddhist teaching, but his thesis is that what he's found in Buddhism has helped him. The rest of Buddhism outside of Mahayana and Zen is not important to his thesis, but I was disappointed. My own immersion in Buddhism is here in Thailand where the form is Theravada and not Mahayana Buddhism. So my reactions were along the lines of "that's new," "that's not what I have heard before," or "that's not how people around here think of it." The Dharma of Thai Buddhism is different from the emphases in Northern Asian Mahayana Buddhism that have been so helpful to Knitter. On top of that my connection with Buddhism has been as a practitioner of Buddhist village and temple life, while Knitter has been engaged in dialogue with

Buddhist intellectuals. Knitter is also a professional theologian, as he frequently mentions, and my field was pastoral and missional. We aren't at the same level.

But even I, as removed as I am from the intellectual strands of the two faiths Knitter and I espouse, choked on his thin rice soup in the chapter on Nirvana and Heaven. First of all Knitter, who can hold symbolism and symbolic language in very high regard, despises Christian language at funerals because the literal meaning of what is said is stretched. But funerals are not pedantic occasions, and the meaning of the language is even less important there than it is in theologizing. Perhaps I quibble, but Knitter can't have it both ways. Either it's OK to use symbolic language or it's not. But, second of all, Knitter doesn't do justice to the issue of karma. It is, as Knitter makes clear, essentially the doctrine that actions have consequences, the consequences are inevitable, they can spread over wide areas and persist through time. It can take multiple life-times to work them off. Knitter finds that the Roman Catholic concept of purgatory may correspond to the more-than-one-lifetime idea in Buddhism. I think it more likely corresponds to the Thai Buddhist idea of narok, which is a hell of punishments for sins through which the more egregious sinners pass before they are reborn into some lower life form.

But here in the southern part of Asia there are two ways of ending the chain of consequences that is the nature of things (Dharma is literally the teaching on "the nature of things.") One way takes a long time and involves the accumulation of more merit than demerit on one's personal account. Merit-making is the motive for virtually all social and philanthropic endeavors as well as all temple practice including the decision to become a monk. But this actually just paves the way for one, in one life or another, to meditate. Vipassana meditation is a form of yoga used by Gautama to achieve the "ah-ha" of Enlightenment,

which extinguishes all one's karma and ends the chain of rebirth into a new round of inevitable suffering, old age and death. Enlightenment is a short-cut, some monks here say, to end the chain. There are several forms of meditation, as there are schools or denominations of Buddhism, but I have never heard of Enlightenment being acquired without some form of meditation that produces an altered state of consciousness.

The debate here has been on whether merit is transferable. If merit can be transferred to offset demerit, then karma can be overcome by a second person. Now, this is not as arcane or irrelevant as it first appears, because the vast consensus here in Theravada-land is that merit can be transferred, and it is being done all the time. Sons, by becoming monks, transfer the merit they obtain to an elder relative, a grandparent who died, or a mother. We acquire some of a monk's vast store of merit by various means. There are blessing ceremonies of a great variety that transfer merit. So it is only a few monks who could argue against the principle that merit can be transferred.

It is difficult, then, for Buddhists to argue against the notion that merit can be acquired from Jesus. If atonement works for a Methodist down on her knees in Birmingham, it can work for a Thai girl down on her knees in Bangkok. The matter can be postponed for a moment about whether the girl must immediately pledge a disavowal of all things Buddhist (which is the "only" [exclusivist] aspect of traditional Christianity that Knitter loathes). The Christian-Buddhist contention is that, yes indeed, the grace of God in Jesus Christ can cover a girl in Bangkok. It also ends the chain of consequences, the very chain that Buddhists call karma.

It was initially perplexing to me that Knitter overlooks this. Actually, I was dismayed by it and then I began to notice the red flags I have posted on my notes. "The primary purpose of all

the language of the Bible is to tell us how to live..." (p. 70). Really? And, wait a minute, right here in the discussion of Nirvana and Heaven, "the good news is that things can get better." Can get, not have gotten? And how is that brought about? The chapter on Nirvana and Heaven doesn't say. It says that it may take a long time, more than one lifetime perhaps, and Knitter insists that our actions have most to do with it.

So, let's see what Christ's role in this is. Knitter's long chapter on "Jesus the Christ and Gautama the Buddha" ought to have some answers. First, we find that Knitter is aggravated by a lot of the literal interpretations that have been made of the accounts of Jesus. Then Knitter tells us that he is bothered by the exclusive, elitist positions that Christianity has taken. Jesus is the "only" way to salvation and the "best" of all teachers. Things like that. So how is it that Jesus is found as savior for Knitter? Knitter's main answer is that Jesus is a Teacher-Savior. To say this does not demote Jesus as Savior, he insists. Jesus awoke to a new level of consciousness which became so profound in him that it reveals the Truth in ways that transform those who become a part of Jesus.

But Jesus is not a fixer, a repairman who reconnects us human beings to God. A Father who demands the death of his son as the price for getting over estrangement from us is inconsistent with a God of Love. Knitter doesn't want to use the idea that Christ had such a store of merit that it was sufficient to cover the karmic demerits (sin) of all who appeal to him. That would be a fix. Knitter has us responsible for that. Transfers of merit are out. So it looks to me that Knitter closes the door on one of the most potentially productive topics of dialogue, about how it might be that Jesus Christ is another way (or a better way, or the only way – Knitter wouldn't like that) to solve the karma problem.

Now we come to the chapter, "Prayer and Meditation," when Knitter talks about his problem with asking God to intervene. "I have the itchy feeling that I'm asking God to do things God is not responsible for (e.g. the weather) or things for which I'm really responsible (exam performance and results, for example)." Knitter does away with petitions and intercessions inasmuch as there is no Superman in the heights above to come down to do what we are asking for in our liturgical as well as our personal prayers. But Buddhism opened up new practices of mindfulness for Knitter. This suggested a new sacrament to him, the Sacrament of Silence, as well as new mental processes that help rescue other sacramental acts from their desecration of the Mystery of the InterBeing (sic).

And in the final chapter where Knitter knits his older liberation theology to his newer socially active Buddhism there is hardly any need for a future-driven action plan to bring about peace. Buddhist insight commends that instead we must "be peace." The Christian notion that if we want peace we should work for justice doesn't jibe with Buddhism's resolute insistence on being in the present. Buddhists do not have an eschatology beyond being fully mindful of what is in the present moment and letting the next moments, not to mention the end times, take care of themselves.

How then is the issue of "the mess" (to use Knitter's favorite term) resolved? It does not involve any of the aspects I am familiar with: no cross, no grace-filled gift, no intervention, no transfer of any kind. It has to do with being merged with greater energy, being connected, networked and being awake and aware. That's how we tackle the mess. I don't think I'm up to it.

Kenneth Dobson
Payap University

Chiang Mai, Thailand

December 7, 2010

Gospel-grounded Church Leadership. A Case Study

Colleagues,

Paul Marshall is the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. His seminary degree (1973) comes from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He once was a Lutheran. Primordially Lutheran, if the next sentence is really true. Namely, that way back in prep school—as I’ve been told—at the Missouri Synod’s junior college in Bronxville, New York, Paul and another seminary-bound whiz-kid, Barry Hong, spent their weekends not roaming the streets of Manhattan, but reading Erlangen (German!) Lutheran theologians.

Macerated in the wars of Missouri, Paul swam the Thames and wound up Anglican in its US format, the Episcopal Church-USA. Paul claims that he has the very last Master of Divinity degree document ever signed by Concordia president John Tietjen before he was dismissed from his office in the Missouri Synod massacre that eventuated in Seminex. How that happened is its own story.

Paul sends me the monthly Bethlehem Diocese newspaper. So I hear what he’s doing and saying. Couple of times already I’ve passed on some of his prose to ThTh readers.

Now and then I tweak Paul about his slide toward certain

Anglican accents that muffle the Augsburg Aha! he once learned at Concordia, and I “splain” to him why Augsburg is closer to the original Biblical Bethlehem (the namesake of his diocese) than Canterbury is. Not only in geography, but in theology. He regularly parries my pokes with a poignant riposte and good conversation ensues.

I sent him such a caveat about one line in what he says below (guess which one it is) and what followed was just like old classroom days at Concordia in the 1970s. One more item: Paul is the only student I ever had who invited me to a bar at the close of a late afternoon class to continue discussion. He even paid for the martinis! The proper drink, of course, for discussing Luther’s theology.

I think Bishop Paul’s message at the diocesan convention in October is good old Augsburg. [Well there IS that one sentence!] With his permission I pass it on to you.

Peace and Joy!
Ed Schroeder

A sermon preached by the Rt. Rev. Paul V. Marshall at the Eucharist during Diocesan Convention on October 9, 2010.

It would not be completely accurate to call them terrorists, but the two men crucified with Jesus were by no means shop-lifters or jay-walkers. The word we are used to translating as “thieves” means something like brigands, bandits, or perhaps insurgents, seriously violent people, desperados. Rome was publicly torturing them to death that Friday as a message to other potential career criminals: resistance to the state is useless.

It is not often that we hear conversations among people who are being killed, so it is worthwhile to listen in. How could we not identify with the first thief? Reality had caught up with him, his future was zero. Tragically, he isn't getting it.

Do we? At what point in life do we realize that the limitations we experience in career and relationship may have something to do with us? There is no one for whom it is not true that personality offers both possibility and limitation, and that some choices follow you. Some people are too frightened to face this, and our thief was one of them.

The first robber had not reached that moment of insight—he blames what is wrong in his life entirely on the outside. From the depths of his rage he lashes out at Jesus.

And who has not been there? Who hasn't been furious with God for something that has gone horribly wrong in their life, furious to the point of bitter rejection of the creator? Who doesn't know something of the robber's emotions about his fate? Who doesn't secretly know or half-know that things at work or at home would be different if they themselves had been different? Who do you blame for your personality defects?

A comedian once said, "My one regret in life is that I am not somebody else." I have often wondered about the pain beneath a joke like that. So the robber spits out his rebuke to Jesus. And Jesus, who is at that moment bearing the sins of the world in the most literal of senses, bears this outburst as well. Jesus, whom the gospels show us besting the best debaters of his time, just lets it go.

I wonder if we always realize that God's apparent silence when we challenge the universe or life itself is a kind of toleration, a non-engagement in what could only get worse. There are times when you argue and times when you don't. Job is an

extraordinarily difficult book to read, and no explanation is satisfactory, but I wonder if God's silence through most of it is a species of kindness.

The second thief is in a different place. He has recognized that his life has caught up with him, and tries to shut the first one up. We don't know how that dialog turned out, but we hear from him the words we will sing many times this noon as we pray for our dead, "remember me when you come into your kingdom."

That cry from the other cross is an act of surrender, and the second robber reminds us of another aspect of our being. After the rage, after running into the brick wall for the millionth time, what is there to say except, "Lord, have mercy?"

There isn't a lot of content in that plea, there are no explanations or apologies, or promises to do better, but there is the heart's cry that each of us who has survived the fourth grade knows, the cry for peace, acceptance, and an end to struggle. From Huckleberry Finn to Catcher in the Rye to The Great Gatsby, in William Shakespeare, Ernest Hemingway, and Iris Murdoch, there is a longing in us for things to make sense and come connectedly to rest. That longing may be sharply defined or just a vague groping after something more, but the second crucified robber gives it voice.

Unlike the first robber, he is ready for peace, and Jesus promises it to him, that very day. Each of these condemned gets what they can handle at the moment. Jesus takes the rage of the first robber, and responds to the plea of the second-all while he himself is dying. If we believe that Jesus was a real human being, really dying by the exquisite torture that was crucifixion, we might wonder why he didn't say, "can't you let a person even die in peace?"

Bruised, beaten, and punctured with spikes, Jesus is shown to us

summoning the energy to care for the person on the cross next to him. To come to today's point. You and I already know that God can absorb our rage. You and I know that Jesus promises to share paradise with us. That is why we are here. These new prayers and lessons "For Forgiveness and Reconciliation" encourage each of us to discover new depths to which we have been accepted, forgiven, and promised peace. And if we were about to break out into groups, the question I would offer is, But what about the person on the cross next to yours?

The Rt. Rev. Paul V. Marshall
Cathedral Church of the Nativity
Bethlehem, October 8, 2010

This has been a year of deeper connections for the Episcopal Church. In our part of the country it is especially joyful news that the two provinces of the Moravian Church have now entered into full communion with us, and that gift will be celebrated nationally in January of 2011. Additionally, for the first time that I know of, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Scranton will be preaching at St. Luke's in Scranton. Beyond that, we are planning a joint Eucharistic celebration with the Methodists for next fall, and of course, our relationship with the Lutherans continues to develop. For the first time, I have been able to receive a Lutheran pastor as an Episcopal priest by a simple letter of transfer.

These are the major indicators, but not the only ones, that Christian witness and service will in God's time regain united focus, that the world may see and know the power of the gospel. Canon Maria Tjeltveit is working on getting the leaders of the Lutheran, Moravian, Episcopal and Methodist communities to a meeting at the same time and place, so that we can begin to put some flesh on the structures of communion that have been

erected.

Members of our House of Bishops and their spouses got to experience a new connectedness within our own church as we met with the fast-growing Coalición de Episcopales Latinos. The fastest growing demographic in our mainland dioceses, Latino Episcopalians will bring us many gifts. For some decades now the church has benefited from the presence of the Union of Black Episcopalians, and it is my hope that the Coalición will similarly help us to eliminate barriers in our family and move into a future that celebrates the beautiful complexity of God's creation.

All of that said; let me speak to our own time this weekend. This is more of a working convention than we usually have. Consequently, things will feel different over the next two days. My address today is one-third shorter than usual and will not review the highlights of the past year. My sermon tomorrow morning will also be shorter, to allow more time for the morning discussion groups to operate. Our worship services will be more compact. There will be fewer lessons and hymns, and the usual processions of clergy, the United Thank Offering, and the Episcopal Church Women's gifts will not occur until next year.

So what is there for us to discuss? This afternoon we will discuss some of the points I am trying to make now, and tomorrow we will hone in more directly on the work of the Congregational Development Committee.

A Committee's New Ministry

A year ago in my address to the convention I expressed a desire for us to reinvent our efforts in congregational development. My reason was that the culture and the economy in NE PA have changed, with dramatic results for the life of the church. Each of us has a list of things that pinch us right now in the

enterprise of being a church, but as a community we don't yet have a pattern of response for these times, and we particularly need a pattern that works from our strengths rather than one that remains fascinated by our perceived weakness.

My prayers were fully answered. A much-enlarged Congregational Development Committee, led by Canon Charles Cesaretti and Fr. Scott Allen, went to work on the challenge I laid down with an enthusiasm that escapes my powers of description. Would the members of that committee who are here today please stand.

Every word of their substantial report needs our attention, but let me tell you what is particularly important to me as a pastor when I look over their work.

Faith in a Time of Anxiety

Decades ago C. H. Dodd observed that Christianity attracted followers in its early days because the new religion was an answer to the troubles of what he was the first to call an "Age of Anxiety." The world's situation was tenuous on almost every level, and multitudes came to find in the practice of the new religion gifts of peace, confidence, and joy for their lives.

We are back in that emotional territory. About the time I was born, Leonard Bernstein was writing his second symphony, which he entitled, "Age of Anxiety." Perhaps that says it all. It is surely unnecessary to give a detailed account of the anxieties our culture has been struggling with for the last sixty-five years. We also don't need to dwell on the extent to which churches and clergy can feel like failures when secular models of success are imposed on them-especially when they are forbidden to use many secular tools to attain that success.

Other writers on the ancient world have pointed out that in times when life was cheap, Christians distinguished themselves

by the care of the poor and helpless, especially abandoned infants.

With this image of Christian origins as a calm and compassionate center in the anxious and violent world of the past and present in mind, I followed the committee's work. I was very grateful for what I observed. Rather than funding yet another research project on what went wrong with the culture or the church, rather than asking which issues of the day could have been better dealt with, the Committee calmly and lovingly went out to talk to parishioners and their clergy about what does work. They consulted with what we might consider larger, wealthier, parishes and they also visited an equal number of parishes facing significant challenges. In all cases, they modeled the important skill known as "appreciative inquiry," listening in an affirming way.

That is, they went as appreciative listeners, seeking to learn in each case what gives a parish cohesion, what it is proud of, and how it assesses its strengths for future ministry. They wanted to know what parishes have to share with their neighbors in the diocese and beyond its community. You have their report, "From Risk to Opportunities" [R20], in your packets, and many of you have seen it before. Many of you have read the summary articles Ty Welles wrote for our diocesan newspaper as well. The committee was delighted at the many experiences of rich parish life that were shared with them. They formulated their recommendations with that memory in the forefront of their minds.

R20 Close Up

I want to make some observations about From Risk to Opportunities before you begin to work on it in your groups and back home. If you have read it, you know that the first and most

important point to make is that From Risk to Opportunities is not another program that your vestry must somehow fit into the schedule of your church. From Risk to Opportunities describes a process for discovery and some organizing principles for what is already happening in churches. It describes a way of being that can shape us during the generation or so that it takes to make permanent change in an organization. It is a gift we will leave to our children and grandchildren.

Using the Product

The process "R20" recommends is grounded before all else in prayer, both personal and corporate. Being in touch with God is nothing more or less than "using the product," and church life makes little sense without it. While prayer means many things, the committee is especially interested in prayer as openness to God in a way that gives "lightness and energy and excitement" to congregations. (R20, p. 10, quoting Reese) Living prayerfully delivers congregations from secular management styles and opens them to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

In this regard, I wish to repeat once more my core beliefs about Vestry meetings; many of you have heard them. The first is that the container shapes the contents: meetings should not take more than 90 minutes, and if they routinely do take longer, there may be a problem in the system. The second is that financial matters must come last on the agenda so that the focus can be on the parish's mission. The third is that leadership meetings must emerge from corporate prayer. If you look at our most energetic parishes, you will find without exception that the environment in which leadership meets is prayerful, most vestries attending to word and sacrament as well as sustained prayer. To help make this point, beginning in January we are re-shaping our Diocesan Council meetings in several ways, and one of them will be to deepen Council's life as a body at prayer.

Planning and Partnership

Back to the committee's report. Out of prayer comes discernment. In *From Risk to Opportunities* the hope is that concentration on our prayer life and listening to God will help each congregation focus on and celebrate what they do well, what they have to share. From there flow questions of goals and planning for the near and long-term future. Planning in one sense means visualizing yourself as successful at some task, really entering that vision and enjoying it-and then asking what you did to get there.

Part of the planning process the committee has in mind here, especially for smaller congregations, is planning for partnership with others. That is hardly news, although we have room to grow in this department. What is new about *From Risk to Opportunities* for some of us will be the emphasis on parishes partnering not just with Episcopal congregations, but with our ecumenical partners and other groups as well. The full communion relations I have mentioned with Lutherans and Moravians, and the developing relationship with the Methodists, may well provide all partners with new possibilities for the future.

Those are my comments on the process, and you will want to read more about it in the report itself. However, I think that the committee's assumptions are worth examining as well. They assume that each of us is aware that our baptismal relationship to Jesus is one of discipleship, a relationship where our Lord gives each of us work to do for the life of the Church and its service to the world. Without that belief our expectations are limited. Church can no longer be for us something we occasionally attend, but is the community where we are nourished for and to some degree express our discipleship.

Transforming the Culture

The writers assume that we are able to live with reality, even if reality means doing without. This is another place where we have something to teach the culture. For example, the budget that the diocese will consider tomorrow is a seriously contracted one, and there are a number of staff positions we are not filling because there isn't money for them. I do not say this as a complaint; I say it as a recognition of certain economic facts that cannot now be helped. A number of congregations have had to make similar decisions about staffing for the same reason. It may be a few years before improvement in finances reaches our level, and we have to unemotionally work with what is. It has never failed to be true that when one door closes another opens-if that is what you are looking for.

In circumstances and times like this it is vital to maintain hope, and as Nathan Duggan told us last spring, hope without a plan is denial. Hope without a plan is denial. We have the opportunity to show the culture what hope looks like when it plans realistically about using and preserving financial and human resources.

This observation about the important ministry of teaching the culture helps me keep to Anglicanism's famous middle way. For example, I am not driven by a daily need to get out there and be what is called "counter-cultural". Equally, I am not driven by a daily need to affirm business as usual at home or abroad.

What I do feel is that culture can be transformed by the witness and sweaty work of committed disciples of Jesus. Whether it was the sinking of the Titanic or the devastation of the First World War, or both, since the beginning of the last century it has been impossible for a literate person to expect inevitable and uniform progress morally or socially. However, as a follower of Jesus I have come to expect that in the moments where individuals or communities give of themselves as Christ gave,

new life breaks through unstoppably. Those moments may not look holy except to those with eyes to see, but it is a special talent of the Holy Spirit not to look very religious, and nowhere does the Bible suggest that the Spirit only works through Christians-quite the contrary. One of our Eucharistic prayers asks, "open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us." That is a subtle phrase, and will come to mind as you hear Sunday's gospel about the grateful leper. Those who so desire can and do see God at work.

Conversation

The committee also expects that we can be in holy conversation. Certainly we invite generous conversation with each other all the time, but as you read *From Risk to Opportunities*, you will see in it the invitation to each congregation's conversation with our perception of our past, our present, and our vision for the future. That call to us is as challenging as it is intriguing.

From my perspective, getting past and future together is not always an easy conversation to hold with others or within ourselves. If you are like me you may have to realize repeatedly that the church of my childhood or other favorite period, a church which I loved and which inspired me, is not coming back, although it has left many traces. There was an extraordinary amount of good about it, and some of that good has been lost while much has been preserved. But there has been other good emerging as well. If history teaches anything, it is that there will always be fresh vision into which we are invited to move, but always at a cost, cultural or emotional. It is o.k. for me to grieve what is gone as long as I ask the question, is what we have now adequate to who we are and how we serve the world?

What is Permanent

The crucified and risen Jesus Christ is eternal, as is his call, "follow me" and his presence with his people until the end. Just about everything else in response to him has adjusted to historical circumstance and the proddings of the Spirit in many and various ways. As I said a minute ago, the lesson of Christian history is that the Holy Spirit continues to lead us into newness of life, some of it quite unexpected.

That is easy to say, and I know that there are some people who like change for its own sake just as there are those who find all change difficult, but generally we need to go easy on each other. One of the hardest verses in the Bible is "behold, I do something new." (Is 43:19) Like many of you, I did not sign on for that: I signed on for personal security, control of my life, and good music. What I have learned, however reluctantly, is that the future I may have dreaded in 1970 turned out not to be such a bad place. The advantage of surviving major illness, in my case heart surgery, is that very little in life seems urgent, while much more in life seems important.

Avoiding Rumpelstiltskin

The result of my own internal conversation between past and future is that I am now mostly ambivalent about the church I once idealized, even idolized. I think that this is maturity, but it may be too soon to tell. I have found that if I expect perfection from the church, I will just go into Rumpelstiltskin mode when it fails that test of perfection, which it cannot help but do. On the other hand, I find that if I try be merely spiritual and to ignore the church in the hope that it will go away, God will send some incredibly gentle and loving saint across my path to remind me that "game over" has not yet flashed on the screen and that I must get back to work with my fellow disciples. What I have come to care about is not a perfect organization but a faithful organization, doing its best to

serve Christ, limping onward to Zion. I have come to care about the present in a way that is informed by the past and invites the future. The present is our home address, and like most of our homes, there is room for improvement, and not all of it will get done before the family comes for the holidays. I am willing to believe that I stand with St. Augustine in trying to cultivate a healthy ambivalence about the church, and about myself-we all contain that which is valuable and that which is not yet finished. The end-product is patience.

What this has to do with our present endeavor is this: there is a temptation to ask too much of the church, and to be crushed when our hopes are dashed by human reality. We are not here this weekend suddenly to fix anything, because there are no miracle cures or magic bullets. We can begin work over the years to make each congregation better and better connected, one step at a time, accepting our personal and organizational imperfections and celebrating God's rich gifts.

Killing George Herbert

The realities of the present are that all the baptized must work together and develop together in their discipleship. Let me say to my colleagues in the clergy that there is a book perhaps worth an afternoon's read. It is called, provocatively, *If You Meet George Herbert on the Road, Kill Him*. I did not write it. For those who don't know, Herbert was a poet who also wrote a book called *The Country Parson*, an idealized view of the perfect priest that has inspired and maddened Anglican clergy for centuries. To put it another way, it has become the seminarians' persecuting superego. I think that the title of the book about killing Herbert is an exaggeration designed to sell books, but the point is worth thinking about. The village parson who was everything to everybody dare exist no longer. In the first place it is not healthy-it is a little known fact that saintly Mr.

Herbert died at age 41 after a whopping three years in parish ministry. The healthy part of moving away from Herbert is that by putting down most of the burden, we make room for others to pick it up, to their souls' joy. In the second place, we do not want parishes where everyone is dependent on the priest for emotional support-that reflects not a theology, but a diagnosis.

Here is where those of you who are teachers may offer something. Teachers know that if you ask a class a question, you may have to be prepared to live through twenty very long seconds of silence before someone suggests an answer. That is not always easy. In the same way, if you as a priest or parish leader say that you can no longer manage a certain parish task, it may take a while before someone else picks it up, but if the task is essential to the life of the parish, somebody will take it on.

So what we hope to see more and more is partnership in parishes, partnerships among parishes, and partnerships with our ecumenical companions, not expecting too much yet expecting everything as God gives it. We are called to act realistically, sharing the load, and integrating our traditions and our future into today's church.

Questions

This address does not have a stirring conclusion, because that is for you to develop in your groups. The committee is providing your table leaders the following questions for you to discuss, so as the Dean says, "don't write this down."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (and make your own)

- What was the most useful part of the bishop's address for our parish?
- How does our parish live a life of prayer? How might we deepen the experience?

- How is the “management style” in our parish marked by “openness to the Holy Spirit?”
- How does our parish presently maintain conversation with both its past and its future?

I ask that you go to your groups now, dropping off your ballots as you go.

Selections from Martin Luther for Advent.

Colleagues,

At our breakfast devotions Marie and I continue to read from DAY BY DAY WE MAGNIFY THEE, “a collection of brief daily readings, arranged according to the Year of the Church and gathered from the writings of Luther.” Compiled and translated by Margarete Steiner and Percy Scott it first appeared in the United Kingdom in 1946 and in North America in 1950. The paperback edition we have comes from Fortress Press 1989.

Here are three of those readings—all from Luther’s preaching in 1522—for Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday in this first week of Advent.

Peace and Joy!
Ed Schroeder

“I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”
Revelation 3:20

He comes, comes unto you. Yea, verily, you go not to Him, neither do you fetch Him. He is too high for you, and too far away. All your wealth and wit, your toil and labor, will not bring you near Him, lest you pride yourself that your merit and worthiness have brought Him unto you. Dear friend, all your merit and worthiness are smitten down, and there is on your side nothing but sheer undeserving and unworthiness, and on His side is pure grace and mercy. Here come together humanity in our poverty and the Lord in His unsearchable riches.

Therefore learn here from the Gospel what happens when God begins to build us into the likeness of Him, and what is the beginning of saintliness. There is no other beginning than that your king comes unto you, and begins the work in you. You do not seek Him, He seeks you; you do not find Him, He finds you; your faith comes from Him, not from yourself, and where He does not come, you must stay outside; and where there is no Gospel, there is no God, but sheer sin and destruction. Therefore ask not where to begin a godly life; there is no beginning but where this king comes and is proclaimed.

—sermon for the first Sunday in Advent, 1522

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.” Luke 1:68

In his first advent God came in a cruel, thick, black cloud with fire, smoke, and thunder, with a great sound of trumpets, so fierce that the children of Israel were filled with fear and dread, and said unto Moses (Ex. 20:19), “All that the Lord has spoken we will do. But speak with us yourself . . . but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” At that time He gave them the Law. The Law is cruel; we do not like to hear it. The Law is such a terror to our reason that at times we fall into instant despair. It is so heavy a burden that the conscience knows not

where to turn, or what to do.

Christ in His advent is not terrible like that, but meek; not fierce like God in the Old Testament, but meek and merciful like a human being. He does not come on the mountain, but in the city. On Sinai He came with terror, now He comes with meekness. There He was to be feared, there He came with thunder and lightning; here He comes with hymns of praise. There He came with the great sound of trumpets, here He comes weeping over the city of Jerusalem. There He came with fear, here He comes with consolation, joy, and love. There He spoke: "Whosoever touches the mount shall be surely put to death," here He says: "Tell the daughter of Zion, her king comes unto her."

Behold, herein you find the difference between the Law and the Gospel, namely, that the Law commands while the Gospel gives all things freely. The Law causes anger and hate, the Gospel gives grace. At the first advent the children of Israel fled before the voice of God, but now our desire to hear it cannot be stilled, because it is so sweet. Therefore, when you are in anxiety and tribulation, you shall not run to Mount Sinai, that is to say, look to the Law for help, neither shall you think that you yourselves have power to atone, but rather shall you look for help in Jerusalem, that is to say, in the Gospel which says: "Your sins are forgiven you; go your way, from henceforth sin no more."

—sermon for Palm Sunday, 1522

"But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law." Gal.4:4

Because the Law can give us neither justification nor faith, and nature with all its toil can gain us nothing, St. Paul now preaches Him who in our stead has won for us such faith, and who

is a master in justification, for justification did not come to us easily, but at great cost, namely, it was paid by God's own Son. Hence the Apostle writes "when the fulness of the time came," that is, when the time of our bondage had come to an end.

For God's ancient people that time was fulfilled with Christ's advent in the flesh, and in like manner it is still being fulfilled in our daily life, whenever a person is illumined through faith, so that our serfdom and toil under the Law come to an end. For Christ's advent in the flesh would be useless unless it wrought in us such a spiritual advent of faith. And verily, for this reason He came in the flesh, that He might bring about such an advent in the spirit. For unto all who before or after believed in Him thus coming in the flesh, even to them He is come. Wherefore, in virtue of such faith, to the fathers of old His coming was ever present.

From the beginning of time to the end of the world everything must needs depend upon this coming, this advent, in the flesh, whereby humanity is set free from bondage, whensoever, wheresoever and in whomsoever such faith is wrought. And the fulness of time is come for every person when we begin to believe in Christ as the One whose advent was promised before all times and who has now come.

—sermon for the Sunday after Christmas, 1522

Segue into Advent on Donated

Righteousness

Colleagues,

We were visiting our daughter, son-in-law and grandkids in suburban Chicago this past weekend. They're members at Grace Lutheran, River Forest, Illinois, where we all showed up for the Sunday service. Besides being blessed with the liturgy and a super Christ-the-King homily from Pastor Bruce Modahl, there was frosting on the cake with a Sunday p.m. Eve-of-Advent cantata vespers And who was the guest homilist? Crossings president Steve Kuhl.

The cantata was Bach's Advent special "Wachet auf!" ["Wake, awake, for Night is flying"] and the scripture text for the homily was the same one Philip Nicolai used when he composed both tune and text of this chorale 400-plus years ago. Steve acquiesced to my request to pass on to you what he proclaimed to us for your own Eve-of-Advent nourishment. Here it is.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

Matthew 25:1-13

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all

those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

The verses and tune for the Bach Cantata we are about to hear did not originate with Bach. Rather, he took what was, by his time, an already old and favorite hymn of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church in Germany and created the arrangement that would become one of his most beloved pieces. The context for the original inspiration of the hymn is significant. It was written in 1597 by pastor and hymn-writer, Philip Nicolai, to bring comfort and hope to his congregation which was devastated by the loss of 1300 men, women and children to the plague. To find inspiration in this tragic moment, he turned to three Scripture texts, one of them being the text I just read from Matthew. What was he, the preacher, to say to his people in such a dark, midnight hour? It was right here in this text:

He was to stir them from their slumber, to reawaken them in faith ... that the Bridegroom who had once come to bear a cross for them... the Bridegroom who rose from the dead conquering the darkness of the grave ... the Bridegroom whom they have already met in the waters of baptism and with whom they are already feasting at the Eucharistic banquet ... THAT BRIDEGROOM has not forgotten them. He will come again! He may be delayed from our perspective, but he will come again to finish what he started... a finish that is here described in metaphorical terms as nothing less than a grand marriage feast for Christ and the

world, the beginning of something brand new, an eternal banquet in which life is envisioned as a celebration of endless joy.

But it's the waiting that is the challenge. It's a challenge, not simply the way waiting-for-time-to-pass is a challenge. Though perhaps that, too. But even more, it's a challenge because of WHERE we wait: in the mid-of-night, in the midst of darkness, at the point of exhaustion, in the haze of "drowsiness," as our text describes it. In such a state – and such a place – we are easily caught off-guard and overtaken by dangers, either unseen because of the cover of darkness or obscured by the haze of drowsiness.

For example, who was not caught "off guard" on 9/11/01 when the Twin Towers, those shining symbols of American economic strength, came crumbling down? Who was not caught off-guard on Christmas Day 2004 when the Asian tsunami overtook the beaches and coastlands of Southeast Asia? Who was not caught off-guard when hurricane Katrina proved to be more powerful than the best laid dikes of modern engineering? The list could go on and on. And it does not consist merely of global-sized surprises. Even within our own most intimate stories we are caught by surprise by all manner of things-from that speeding ticket we got because we were distracted from the task at hand to the shuffling of life's plans because of the arrival of unexpected health issues. The text states it clearly: neither the wise nor the foolish bridesmaids are immune from such unexpected hazards. Such is the darkness in which we sit... such is the drowsiness that creeps over us.

Still, it needs to be said that there is not necessarily any fault incurred for being so caught off-guard by historical events. Jesus himself says as much when he says that we can expect "to know neither the day nor the hour." That line of

wisdom applies as much to that future that we simply call "tomorrow" as it does to that future that we call "the last day." As the old adage goes, even "the best laid plans of mice and men" can result in unexpected outcomes. No one is expected to predict the future. So what distinguishes the wise from the foolish? Answer, "the oil." The wise have their oil; the foolish have none. And what is this oil? It is their righteousness. It is the source, the fuel, that allows them to shine in the darkness, even when events would threaten to overtake them.

Far worse than being caught "off-guard," then, is being caught "off-guard" without your righteousness. It is literally like being caught with your pants down. Think of it. You are driving down the road, perhaps unaware of much that is immediately ahead of you. Then all of a sudden you see a patrol car coming up behind you with lights aglow and sirens a-blaring. What do you do? You look down at your speedometer. And what are doing? You are checking out your righteousness. And once you look, there is one of two reactions: sheer panic or overwhelming relief. In the last analysis, what matters most is not whether you are caught off-guard by a patrol car, but whether you are caught in the right or in the wrong, whether you are caught with or without your righteousness. Indeed, one aspect of wisdom is knowing your righteousness, like your Visa Card, is the one thing you should never be found without.

And yet, even more important than the wisdom of knowing that you need righteousness is the wisdom of knowing where it comes from and how you get it. In that regard the foolish bridesmaids are twice foolish. When caught by surprise at the announcement of the coming end of the age-that their time of reckoning was up-the foolish bridesmaids did, in a sense, wise-up. They did come to the realization that they needed righteousness. But they also knew that they didn't have it. And so, in an act of desperation they turn to their companions and ask them for some of their

righteousness... revealing their foolishness all the more. The wise bridesmaids COULDN'T share with them their righteousness, even if they wanted to. That's not how things work. How foolish to think otherwise! To think such is tantamount to thinking that the wise bridesmaids could be your savior.

And so, wising-up to that fact, namely, that the WISE bridesmaids are not the source of righteousness, the foolish bridesmaids scramble off to see if they can buy enough righteousness for themselves. But again, they only show how foolish they are. There is no way in this lifetime that they could purchase the requisite righteousness that would qualify them to join the procession of the righteous, the wise, into the wedding feast. They may knock at the door and demand entrance, but all they will hear is "I don't know you." Meaning, I don't recognize your righteousness. And so the door will be shut and the foolish bridesmaids will be left out... all because they are twice foolish: they know neither the source from which the righteousness of the wise bridesmaids comes nor the way by which it is acquired.

But they should have known... and so should we. That's because this Bridegroom who is expected to come at the end of time, has already come in the midst of time as the man we know as Jesus. To be sure, there was not a lot of fanfare with this coming, but it did, nevertheless, come with a shout, a very public shout: a shout that was heard by shepherds from angels, by wise men from the Scriptures, by sinners in the wilderness from John the Baptist, by Jerusalem from a crucified messiah and by scared apostles from a resurrected Lord. Indeed, that shout, "Look! Here is the Bridegroom! Come out and meet him!" is still being shouted today. And it is a shout that is twice wise: REPENT (that is, give up the illusion of purchasing your own righteousness) and BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS (that Christ is our righteousness, free for the believing).

Christ's first coming, which is still at work among us, has one distinct purpose: to provide the unrighteous with the oil of righteousness, the righteousness of faith, Christ's own righteousness, the forgiveness of sins. Why do you think the Bridegroom in the story knows the WISE and NOT the FOOLISH bridesmaids? Answer-because he recognizes himself in them... his very own righteousness in them... a righteousness that consists in the forgiveness of sins ... a righteousness that is manifest in them as repentance and faith. This righteousness Jesus the Bridegroom established in a most surprising way: by dying a very public death, on a very public cross, for very public sinners-for you and me. And this righteousness he still continues to dispense, very publicly, through the cry of the church by the guidance of the Spirit. It is to the presence of this Christ that Philip Nicolai wanted to awaken his congregation and that Bach, in his Cantata, wished to awaken us.

"Look!" goes the shout. "Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" Where do we meet him? In the waters of baptism... There we meet him in forgiveness and faith... There we are known by him as brothers and sisters, children of God. Where do we meet him? In the Eucharistic Banquet, the foretaste of the heavenly banquet. There we meet him, his very body and blood, in bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins. Where do we meet him? In the preaching of his Word, his promise of mercy, his invitation to the banquet, his announcement of good news. Where do we meet him? In the person of those wise bridesmaids who have the oil of righteousness-that is, in YOU who are Christ's believing disciples. For if in a moment of tragedy, someone suddenly realizes that they lack sufficient righteousness and they foolishly ask you, "Please, give me some of your righteousness," you know exactly what to say:

I'm sorry, but I can't give you my righteousness. For my righteousness is not of my own making but a righteousness of

repentance and faith. And I can neither repent for you nor believe for you. But I can introduce you to the Christ so that he can be your righteousness too: He is the one in whom you can trust, the one before whom you can repent, the one by whom you are forgiven, the one with whom you will be escorted into the heavenly banquet.

So. . . Keep watch, keep faith, let Christ be your oil . . . your righteousness. Amen.

Steven C. Kuhl

Reflections on THE Gospel, Another Visit Downunder

Crossings Colleagues,

Our house guest for a few days this week is Norman Habel, Aussie Wunderkind. His work could itself be the topic for this week's Thursday Theology post, but it isn't. Though if it were, I'd start out with this:

1. Norm is a world-renowned OT scholar with a commentary on the Book of Job in the Westminster John Knox Press series.
2. . . . is making headlines today with his creating—and convincing several church bodies to support the insertion of—a “Season of Creation” into the church year during September prior to the Day of St. Francis. If you want to see what—what all—this already has become, check this URL <http://seasonofcreation.com/>
3. . . . is initiator and promoter of a new “green look” at

the Bible, his series THE EARTH BIBLE and the forthcoming EARTH BIBLE COMMENTARY. Google the first three words for details. He has just published a new “green” Biblical study called AN INCONVENIENT TEXT.

4. And way back in his early days as Old Testament prof at Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) a half century ago, creator of THE PURPLE PUZZLE TREE, a Bible-story-telling-for-kids series published by CPH that masses of Missouri Synod kids (and their parents!) got hooked on in those days. He’s currently hustling a cyber-friendly reworked version of that primordial purple prose. Check <http://www.purplepuzzletree.com.au> for details.

But all that is what I’m NOT attending to today. [If you want to know more, Google his name. You’ll get 30K hits.]

After the hullabaloo at Concordia Seminary back in the 1970s, Norm—one of the “bad guys” in the Old Testament department—returned to work in Australia, and years later inveigled the Lutheran Seminary there to ask me to come as guest lecturer for the 1994 academic year. And that’s the segue to today’s post. You’ve seen a few of these before from that era. Here are two more items that I confected for students during those two semesters in Adelaide, South Australia.

Peace and Joy!
Ed Schroeder

Course Title: Biblical Foundations. New Testament

What is THE Good News?

1. There is no “generic” statement in the Bible of the GOOD NEWS.

2. Good News is always expressed in “case-specific” terms, for some specific person, people, in a specific situation where “specific” BAD NEWS is the truth about them.
3. The over-arching Biblical term for the BAD NEWS about People which only God (and not just a good psychiatrist) can heal is SIN.
4. But sin too arises only in case-specific forms to specific people in specific situations.
5. There are some regular repeaters in the Bible about the form (the image, the metaphor) of the BAD NEWS in individual persons and in their particular cases. Although all could be called a manifestation of sin, each has its own dynamics: Guilt, shame, enslavement, death, oppression, despair/depression, fear, works-righteousness, etc.
6. And thus we also find some corresponding different forms/images/metaphors for God’s GOOD NEWS to be case-specific for these specific forms of BAD NEWS.
7. Thus for Guilt, it’s the GOOD NEWS of Christ as forgiveness;
for shame, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is acceptance;
for enslavement, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is freedom;
for death, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is his conquest of death;
for oppression, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is rescue and liberation;
for despair/depression, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is hope;
for fear, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is his invitation of faith: “Fear not, just trust me.”
for do-gooder works-righteousness, the GOOD NEWS is free (gift) righteousness, and so on.
8. Thus to teach a Bible text and do it so that it comes out Gospel, you have to see/hear what the BAD NEWS is. Or another way of saying it: what is the malady that gets

“fixed” by the Gospel in this text? And then, of course, the second question: How does the person, the situation, then look when the Gospel has “fixed” the malady? What is the shape of the life that follows from malady-healed?

Case Study.

9. The BAD NEWS in Matthew 4 is clearly temptation, Jesus himself (and we Christians too) not immune from God’s own enemy going after us to do what? (What’s the tempter’s goal when tempting God’s children—both Jesus and us?) This one is dicey because popular piety has made the tempter out to be a very “little” devil, concerned with itsy-bitsy sins. Not so in the Bible. Not so in this text of Jesus’ own temptations. What’s he trying to do with Jesus? Not just once, but three times. Three times to achieve the same goal.
10. One help is to look at the immediately preceding episode in Matthew’s Gospel, namely, what happens to Jesus there at the Jordan and what the tempter is out to do right after Jesus has been baptized.
11. Another help is to study closely the first (ever) temptation episode in the Bible in Genesis 3. It is the Biblical classic for what happens in every temptation story. Matthew’s story of the temptation of Jesus has exactly the same dynamics as the drama of Genesis 3. Let’s see if we can work them out.
12. If we thus get clarity on the malady in this text, what’s the Good News the text offers to us? We must ask, of course, first of all, what is the Good News in the text for Jesus himself?
13. Then from that Good News in the Text for the person in the text (in this case Jesus Himself), what is the GOOD NEWS about Jesus that is GOOD NEWS for us?
14. Remember the GOOD NEWS about Jesus for us is always linked

to the end of his story, his death on the cross and his resurrection. The 4 Gospels (Mt., Mk., Lk., Jn.) are actually just long introductions to Jesus' Passion and Resurrection. So you are not "cheating" on a text that comes earlier on in the 4 Gospels when you "go to the back of the book" to get the full story of all the GOOD NEWS.

15. What is the "full" GOOD NEWS for us in the story of the Temptation of Jesus when you "go to the back of the book" to see again how the whole story came out?

ehs

Course Title: Christian Ethics

Discussion items for Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ETHICS

Topic: Karl Barth and Martin Luther in DB's theology

1. The four stages (according to biographer E. Bethge) of DB's writing this "non-book." Non-book because DB himself never put together the bits and pieces that after his death Bethge and others collected and published as his Ethics.
2. The theological heritage from his LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON.
 - a. The religion-less secularity of 20th century western culture.
 - b. The call to follow Christ in such a world "etsi deus non daretur" equals "even if there were no god."
 - c. "Christ the center."
 - d. Christ "the man for others."
3. The tug-of-war in his ETHICS between his appreciation of Karl Barth's theology and his own Lutheran confessional heritage. Barth's proposal: radical "Lordship of Christ," God's claim over the whole world by virtue of the

incarnation as a radical "Good News" answer to the "religion-less" world of DB's day.

Lutheran critics of Barth said that he too quickly accepted the world's self-proclaimed "religion-less-ness" at face value. That itself was part of the world's own delusion, that just because humans ignored God, that made their world religion-less. Maybe they did indeed eliminate "religion" from their conscious lives [they didn't go to church, didn't bother about religion in their ethics and human interactions], but they did not thereby eliminate God from their actual daily life. God the creator continued to do what God the creator had always done—even in epochs of "religion" in world history. Namely, God continued to be creator (*creatio continua*), sustainer, preserver, legislator, judge and executor in the creation.

For Barth (and DB?) what God has to overcome when sending Christ into the world (incarnation) is "revelation," to wit, showing humankind that they've got it all wrong. First of all, God is not a God of "religion" at all. No, he is (and always has been) the merciful deity who is "for" humankind and not against them. The central element in human sinfulness is not immorality, but ignorance: ignorance of who/what God really is, and therefore who/what humankind really is intended to be. To overcome this (almost) overwhelming ignorance in people, God finally goes all the way to the cross to drive home once-and-for all God's grace, mercy, forgiveness, love for the human race.

The Lutherans in the debate with Barth claimed that human sinfulness was much worse than such ignorance, even as damnable and perverse as Barth showed that ignorance to be. No, they said, the malady of human sinfulness is not only that sinners are alienated from God, ignorant about

the truth of God and the truth of themselves. What's really bad about human sinfulness is the relational reality: humankind created by God with incredible faculties (images of God, no less!) are rebels; at the deepest level they don't love that creator God at all. That doesn't mean they "ignore" God. Rather they hate God. Their lives curved-into-themselves amounts to a radical enemy-status with God.

And the worst of it all is not just how "baaaad" we are, but that the God who created us (a jealous God with reference to the creatures he made) says: I won't stand for that. I'll visit the iniquities of those who hate me with the "fairness" consequences of my law: The wages of sin is death.

Now to remedy that deep, deep, deepest dilemma takes more than revelation of just how merciful God really is. It takes action to rectify (literally: make right again) our human ethical dilemma with God. God says: You're not righteous enough, not faithful to me enough, etc. In short you are a sinner, and the payoff is you-know-what. In view of this alternate Lutheran anthropology, soteriology—namely, saving such humans—is a different task than Barth proposes.

God-in-Christ needs to reconcile sinners to God (not just clear up their knowledge-defect about God), not counting their trespasses (which is what God "normally" does with sinners, and does so "fairly") against them. God pulls off this reconciliation by "making his Son to be sin in our stead, so that we can become God's kind of righteousness in him."

Barth needs no such "sweet swap" to get the human race

saved. Calvary is a revelation of just how grace-oriented God is to sinners—God will “go all the way” to get us back. The Lutheran confessions claim that sin is more radical than Barth presents it, and therefore Christ has a bigger job to do in order to get sinners back to God. One might say: the sinner’s problem is ethical, not informational. His life and works don’t measure up to God’s criterion of evaluation for what a human being was created to be. To save the human race, the humans themselves need first a new ethos for themselves. Then they could begin living that new ethos out in the world of daily life.

So God does indeed connect with any- and every-thing in the world thru Christ when the new ethos is enacted, created, made real in the world. What that new ethos replaces is not human cussedness or human ignorance, but the previous ethos we all have before God, an ethos that would eventually kill us. God operates in his world bestowing two ethos-verdicts on humans. Everyone gets the first ethos-verdict (sinner) because that’s what we are as we come onto the world scene, that’s what we verify in the way we live our lives—not fearing God, not trusting God, and curved into ourselves. The second (new, changed) ethos-verdict comes only through Christ and our participation in Him. But not everyone in the world has such participation (some don’t want to have it, some haven’t heard that it’s available).

Christ’s redemption is good for the entire world. The entire world does not (yet) enjoy that redemption and its ethos. So to that extent Christ is not (yet) actually “ruling the whole creation” in any realistic fashion. Where Christ is not (yet) exercising his “management by God’s mercy,” God is still the creator-in-charge. He

manages that “old” world the same way God has always done: the law of justice, fairness, equity. Sinners’ lives are preserved, and the sinners themselves are held accountable before God. (That’s the law in its use #1 and use #2 in Lutheran parlance.)

[2010 addendum: Yet even such a “greener” world of justice and equity, now extended to planet-wide care of every creature, is not yet “set free from its bondage to decay . . . [is still] groaning in travail . . . still waiting for the children of God to unveil for it” Christ’s “adoption” and “redemption” offer. It is only creatures already so “adopted” and “redeemed” who have a clue for transforming creation—even a green creation—into God’s “new” creation. (Rom. 8)]

Christianity and Politics.

Colleagues,

She’s back again. Who? Marie Failing. This time—on the day after Luther’s 527th birthday—she reviews another book wherein Blessed Martin gets considerable attention, though she wishes the author had paid “closer” attention. When Prof. Failing is not treating us to such thoughtful analysis—as she also did just a fortnight ago with another Luther essay (ThTh 646)—she attends to her calling as Professor, Hamline University School of Law, and also Editor of The Journal of Law and Religion.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

[P.S. Corrigendum. In my own venture into Reformation theology with last week's post, I quoted the English translation of Luther's Mighty Fortress line, "Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn Und kein' Dank dazu haben," as "The Word they still shall let remain, Nor any thanks have for it." Art Preisinger passed on to me this note from his friend Ulrich Goebel, a knowledgeable scholar in the language of Luther: "Is Schroeder perpetuating the mistaken notion that Early New High German 'Dank' means English 'thanks'? 'Dank' (a verbal nominative belonging to the verb 'denken') does not mean 'thanks' but 'thought, reflection, reason' in ENHG (as in modern German 'der Gedanke'). In other words, this line is not confusing at all. It is a mistranslation."

So possibly to be rendered: "They won't even give it a thought."]

Now to Prof. Failing's prose.

C.C. Pecknold, Christianity and Politics: A Brief Guide to the History (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock. Cascade Books, 2010). \$23.

It is always difficult to explain accurately how we got from Aristotle and Augustine to the sins of the modern world, particularly so in a short book, which CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICS is at 168 pages. However, sometimes the effort is worthwhile even if the history can only be sketched, if it helps to correct mistaken "common wisdom" or opens a new window that helps us re-think our past. And sometimes it is simply enough to provide a reasonably accurate reader to those who are not likely to go much further into the literature so long as the reading is indeed fair and reasonably thoughtful.

Pecknold's book, which is aimed at providing such a sketch to undergraduates and such, starts out promisingly enough. It is written in an interesting and accessible style, and tells a few good stories along the way. Pecknold begins by sketching the Greek view of politics as "the highest good, the whole purpose of the community," (2) a civil religion that became the stage where virtue played itself out toward a common good. From there he moves quickly to Rome, where the sheer vastness of empire and concentration of power destroyed citizens' sense of community membership and eliminated the space for a "systematic knowledge and vision of the whole" (14) necessary for an authentic political philosophy. In the face of that decline, Christianity represents a "new and stunning vision" of the goal of politics (17) –the early church is a new form of community that comprehensively orders life in challenge to earthly politics because it offers "a dimension of HOPE" in a new telos, the calling of history toward true freedom in God's new city. (20) As Pecknold describes it, participation in the resurrected life of Jesus ("corpus Christi") has brought Christians into communion with God and their neighbors who share "this communion of God's love" (22) sustained by the Eucharist. Such a mystical union crossing old allegiances outshines the bonds Rome built on friendship and reconciliation, and challenges the empire's comprehensive truth-claims with its own.

In Pecknold's retelling, a critical mistake occurs when "the mystical body" ("corpus mysticum") of the Eucharist, linking Christ's historical body with the communion of the church, is unhooked from the Eucharist itself. By the 12th century, Pecknold writes (following Henri de Lubac) that the Catholic Church has become the "corpus mysticum" and the Eucharist the "corpus verum", that is, simply an experience of individual piety. From there, it is easy to borrow the "corpus mysticum" into a temporal setting, where the church itself becomes

responsible for making human communion possible, with authority to confer that mystical power upon secular leaders. For Pecknold arguing de Lubac, the “separation between the mystical and the real, or the personal and communal” then gives way to the development of the church’s “juridical, material” power. From there, it is an easy step to replace the church as the “corpus mysticum” with king and then with the nation-state, with the resulting corruption in the formation of human community and human loyalties.

I follow this tale with interest, but at the Reformation, Pecknold loses me. As a Lutheran laywoman, I often judge such histories by how close they get to understanding Luther’s theology, perhaps because if they get Luther wrong or sort of wrong, I wonder if they are simply working off other people’s histories rather than taking a fresh look at the evidence themselves. I’m a tell-tale Lutheran: I get more agitated by what I take to be inaccurate representations of Luther’s theology than by claims that he was responsible for all of the major ills (or advancements) of modernity. Perhaps because I have no competence to judge proofs of Luther’s effect on secular history, or am not quite sure why it matters. But theological misreadings are serious!

Pecknold’s take on Luther is as follows: Luther transferred the Church’s prerogatives to the State. A reformer and a “purist at heart” (!) Luther “sought a purified church that was free to be pure because the state was so strong,” free from “scholasticism’s speculative doctrine, free of philosophy, free of ecclesiastical authority and hierarchy, free from complexity, and most importantly of all, free from the corruptions of politics.” (85) When the boastful Luther received pushback on his (perhaps originally legitimate) reform effort, he came to believe that “the only path to spiritual reform” was to reject external church structures in “favor of a more internalized,

spiritualized, and 'democratized' form of the Christian life," the priesthood of all believers. (87) Luther shifted "the priesthood from a corporate, participatory identity to a highly reductive view of all individual believers as priests making their own private spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ" which provided "powerful support for his political claim that the hierarchy of deacons, priests and bishops ran counter to the gospel." (88) (From an Augustinian view, Pecknold writes, "a crucial problem with Luther's view of grace is his conviction that it is always unmediated, interior and invisible" rather than "necessarily mediated through Christ's body, in the one, holy, catholic church." 89)

So, Pecknold continues, Luther's attempt to depoliticize the church coupled with his recognition that some structure was needed to permit the church to flourish led Luther to transfer the church's power to the state, "effectively granting the 'temporary authority' a monopoly on power." (88) Thus Luther sets the stage for Machiavelli: Luther "plays a role in helping to give the state the power to form the conscience, the power to collect mass allegiances, the power to form a people. The state is now unhinged from any other institutional authority that could morally check its power; the state is free to construct itself, and conduct itself, according to its own norms." As such, with the two kingdoms doctrine, Luther has made the church "so institutionally weak that it NEEDED the state," (91) at least for outward protection (while it would "inwardly rely upon Christ alone"), thus "entirely" spiritualizing the church and making "the church a servant of the state." (93) After that critique, Pecknold catches himself a little: it's likely that Luther fell "prey to unintended consequences."

What can one say! I must confess that, Lutheran sinner that I am, my first thought was, "I know where this is going. . ." and in this case, my terrible suspicions seem not so far off. In the

end, recognizing that it will be “controversial to say so,” Pecknold concludes that the divisions among Christians will not be healed unless modern Christians recognize their failure to grasp the importance of the papal office as “shepherd of conscience” and “advocate of Christian memory” and the necessity of reconciling the Church with “Rome as a visible sign of what is invisibly and organically happening in a global and distributive way in the worship of triune God everywhere.” (164) Asking what place non-Christians have in this conversation, Pecknold suggests that they can take comfort in Pope Benedict’s view that “religion always needs to be purified by reason” (151) though he also acknowledges that “reason always stands in need of being purified by faith; this also holds true for political reason, which must not consider itself omnipotent.” (152)

In between, the story goes something like this: Luther set the stage for Machiavelli to re-define politics as institutional interest-conflict management and the virtues based on the needs of the state to survive. Calvin was a little better than Luther, because he recognized that “a conscience needed a community” of church, civil society and civil government to discipline it in the virtues necessary to achieve the common good. Calvin’s collective conscience morphed into Hobbes’ social conscience which reduced itself to community as managing conflicting economic self-interest. Once we get to the “social contract,” government becomes the tool of the wealthy and powerful few, and the good is defined via Locke as the pursuit of self-interest. Rousseau sees the need for humans to return to community, but rejects social institutions as interfering with that possibility, thus paving the way for “the personal roots of modern liberal democracy.” Pecknold follows this theme to the work of Sheldon Wolin, who wants to unhook the concept of the mystical body from the king, economic liberalism, the nation-state or civil society, all poor substitutes for the Christian

communion. Pecknold likes Wolin's yearning for something better, and his critique of the distortion of the "corpus mysterium", but he wants to describe more positively what we yearn for.

While I have given away the punch line to his proposal, Pecknold's book does remind believers that as the church, we need to imagine both visible and invisible ways of being in unity. He rightfully demands that Christians begin to remember that we are participating "in the communion of God's triune love" and that we must learn to "conform ourselves to [Christ's] presence with us," not as a sideline to our more important earthly life, but as life itself. I think Luther himself might approve of Pecknold's call that we should be changed by the encounter with truth poured out for us in the incarnation-if not the conclusions about the relationship of church and world that he comes to from that call.

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Homily for Reformation Day Celebration 2010

Colleagues,

Five (or is it six?) small Lutheran congregations in rural southern Illinois gathered for a Reformation Day Festival last Sunday afternoon at St. John's, Bremen, IL. A signal of Bremen's modest size is that there's no longer a Post Office in town. These congregations, as I understand it, are linked into a

unique sort of consortium in the Central-Southern Illinois Synod (ELCA) with two pastors who jointly carry out a circuit-rider sort of shepherding of these communities. As they were planning the event, apparently someone told someone – and I was invited to be the proclaimer. I accepted. The order of service was Luther's Deutsche Messe [The German Mass—in English, of course].

After the liturgical festivity, there was, of course, a potluck supper. The cuisine prepared by “the ladies” of mostly German-heritage went far beyond what Garrison Keillor describes coming from the Norwegian Lutherans in Lake Wobegon. And the highlight of the entertainment was Marie Schroeder's story—a true story—about the ham served at another southern Illinois Lutheran church. The former pastor of that church himself had told it to us.

In a similarly small town it was the custom at the local Lutheran church that after funerals there was a meal prepared by the congregation's Ladies Aid Society. The tradition went like this: For the ham that was always the entree, it was “free” if the deceased was a woman who had been a member of the society. It was also free if the deceased was a man whose wife was a society member. If neither of these pertained, the family was asked to contribute \$25 for the ham.

On one such occasion, the deceased woman was not a society member. After the meal the husband came to the society officers offering a check for \$100 to cover the fee for his wife “and me too when I die.” “That check created great consternation for the society members,” the pastor told us. “For days they debated whether or not to accept it, for ‘who knows what the price of ham will be when this man dies?’”

Now to the serious stuff.

Peace and Joy!

The Biblical texts for the day were the regular ones for Reformation Day:

Jeremiah 31:27-34, Romans 1:19-28 and John 8:31-36.

Luther's world 500 years ago was very different from ours. No electricity. Can you even imagine your life with no electricity? No aspirin. No pills of any kind. No x-ray machines. Can you imagine . . . No gasoline. No cars. No concrete. Can you imagine . . . And of course with no electricity, no TV, no internet, no cell phone. A "no" to most all the "stuff" that is "normal" for us.

But his world was also very much the same as ours: The church was in a mess. Politics were a jungle. And also this: Muslim armies from Turkey had made their way into Europe all the way to Vienna. That means they were as close to Luther's home town as from here to Chicago. And even closer to each German citizen—as it still is for each of us here today – was the internal compulsion to be "right," and to document that whenever it was challenged.

And what does Luther do? Lots and lot of things, as we all know. Today is the actual date (Oct. 31) when he put his famous 95 theses out on the bulletin board in Wittenberg. The year was 1517. Seven years from now that'll be 500 years. There's more than one Reformation Day sermon right there in those theses.

But the one thing we want to look at today is this: What does he do in the middle of all that chaos? In the same year 1529 when he writes his essay "On War Against the Turks," he writes the hymn A Mighty Fortress is Our God. The melody was original with him, though he took the words from Psalm 46, which we just sang

a few minutes ago. One thing he added to the Psalm 46 text was the very lively presence of the devil. Which was for him not some impish Halloween character, but real and experienced encounter with destructive powers opposing us over which we have no control. Your and my life too in our so-called modern world knows about such forces working against us—and nothing we can do will make them go away. Luther learned the Bible's own labels for this seemingly personified opponent: the destroyer/wrecker (diabolos), the accuser (Satan) and the liar (super-deceiver).

Luther put those Psalm words into German for Christians of his day to sing when everything is in a mess, when everything is up for grabs, when the super-wrecker, super-accuser, super-liar comes on the scene.

Its a good hymn for us. Your and my world—even with gasoline, TV, internet, text-messages and super high-tech medicine – is still in a mess. Church mess, political mess, economic mess—world-wide mess. And even closer to home, there are some messes inside each of us too. Which regularly when the super-opponent in any of his guises confronts us.

But before we go to that hymn, we should not forget what we've already heard in those three readings from the Bible, Jeremiah, Romans and John's Gospel. There is a Big word in each of those readings. They all start with "F." But none of them is a dirty word. Just the opposite.

Jeremiah tells of God's New Covenant, God's new deal, to come someday when God "will forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more." Big word FORGIVENESS. Sinners get forgiven. That big day came when Jesus came.

Reading from Romans. Big word FAITH. The nickel word for FAITH is TRUST—not first of all something you believe in your head, but something you hang your heart on. FAITH, says St. Paul, is

the answer to the BIG question: How do you live your life RIGHT? How do you get to be “right”? Aka “righteous.” How do you get to be OK? Finally, OK with God? The sensible way, so it seems, is to start doing right stuff. Shape up!—obey God’s law—all of it, the whole shebang. When you do the right thing, you become a right gal, a right guy. RIGHT? But of course it never works. Says Paul: “All fall short.” Nobody ever makes it to the finish line “right.”

Just check yourself by the first commandment. “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your mind, all the time.” Who in this gathering—preacher included—has done that “all the time” this past week? Who has done that just since breakfast?

Thank God, there’s that New Deal that Jeremiah was talking about. And Jesus is the center of it. For folks who always “fall short” “they are now OK by God’s kindness as a freebie through the redemption [big word for “bring ’em back home”] that is in Christ Jesus.” When sinners trust Jesus, they are OK with God—no matter what a mess they are, no matter how much baggage they carry, no matter what the wrecker, accuser, liar may be doing or saying to them. Listen again to Paul’s last sentence: “We hold that a person is OK with God by faith—by trusting Jesus’ word of forgiveness—and not by our track record according to the law.”

That leads to our third reading where the word is FREEDOM. “If God’s Son, Jesus, makes you FREE—free from all that mess, free from all that baggage—YOU ARE REALLY FREE!” There is no freedom that can beat that.

OK, let’s take these three big words—FORGIVENESS, FAITH, FREEDOM and walk/talk our way through those four verses of A Mighty Fortress. I’ll use the translation I memorized in parochial school 70 yrs ago.

"A mighty fortress is our God, A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from every need That hath us now o'ertaken."

When the world at large, when your own "little" world is a mess, where do you run for help? People always run to whatever their heart is hanging on, whoever their god is. OUR God is the one who sent Jesus. That's where we hang our hearts. And if today (again) your heart and mine were hanging somewhere else, then let that one go and hang your heart here.

Here is where the FORGIVENESS word comes from "every need." The biggest NEED we all have is to be right. FORGIVENESS is God's weird way to make wrong people right—to get sinners un-sinned. [A Lutheran pastor I know tells it this way: Some people say sex is the most powerful drive in people. I don't think so. Instead it is the drive in all of us to be "right." If you don't believe that, just get married.] FORGIVENESS is God's new deal to make wrong people right. Lutherans included.

"The old evil foe Now means us deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might Are his dread arms in fight,
On earth is not his equal."

"It IS a jungle out there, Jane!" Behind the bigger and smaller stuff that's coming at us is God's own enemy, still running around messing up God's world, messing up us too—wrecker, accuser, liar. Apart from God and God's beloved son there is no power "equal" to cope with that enemy.

"With might of ours can naught be done – Our loss were soon effected."

If we try on our own to cope with the super-messer behind the messes, we're guaranteed losers. But Christ-trusters aren't "on their own." We are actually "owned" by Someone Else. That's what

St. Paul's word "redemption" is all about: God regaining ownership of folks owned by someone else, some "other" god. Listen to the next lines.

"But for us fights the valiant One, Whom God himself elected.
Ask ye who is this? Jesus Christ it is,
The Lord Sabaoth, There is no other God;
He holds the field forever."

He holds the field. That's not a corn field or soybean field. It's battlefield, our battlefield. Christ is the winner in the battlefield—our own person battlefields—ever since Easter. If He can lick death, he can lick anything. You name the mess, you call on his name, He makes you a survivor. Yes, there are "other gods," but no other one who can conquer the super-adversary and then "hold the field forever."

That's where the FAITH word comes in. Where do you hang your heart day in, day out—and especially when your world is tumbling down? When you're getting crucified yourself? God's best offer is: Hang your heart here. On the one who came out alive on Easter. "It was a strange and dreadful fight, When Life and Death contended. The victory remained with Life, the reign of Death was ended. His sting is lost forever. Hallelujah!"

The final two verses are about FREEDOM. They need very little commentary.

"Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us;
We tremble not. We fear no ill. – They shall not overpower us.
This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none. He's judged. The deed is done,
One little word can fell Him."

Lutheran folks have often wondered what Luthier had in mind with that last sentence. What is the “one little word” that dismisses the super-wrecker, super-accuser, super-liar? One of today’s best-known Lutherans in America is Martin Marty, a graduate of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis way back in 1952. With a twinkle in his eye Marty once said: “I think the one-little-word Luther had in mind is B00!” Meaning, “you don’t scare me anymore. I’m Christ-connected. So B00! Get out of here.” In Luther’s own life he often said that he recited two words when the super-enemy was getting at him. Two Latin words: Baptizatus sum. “I am baptized.” Which means “I’m connected to Christ So beat it. Get out of here.”

That’s real FREEDOM.

And now FREEDOM once more in the final verse—how you live your life day in day out.

“The Word they still shall let remain, Nor any thanks have for it;

He’s by our side upon the plain, WIth His good gifts and Spirit.”

Notice: THE WORD is a “he.” Christ is the WORD of GOD Luther’s talking about. Not the Bible, but God talking to us in the person and work of Jesus. That WORD is filled with these F-words. Word of FORGIVENESS, calling us to FAITH/TRUST in that Christ-message, from which comes FREEDOM like you’ve never seen it before.

Of course, there is always a “they” who thumb their noses at that WORD, give God no thanks for it. And we also get sucked in to joining the “they.” But “they” are still losers, and so are we, when we hang our hearts somewhere else. Still this Christ

sticks with us “upon the plain.” In our “plain lives,” here on the plains of southern Illinois. HE still remains. And as John’s message says: “If you remain in my WORD—the WORD OF GOD that I AM—you will remain FREE.” Free from here to eternity.

“And take they our life, Goods, fame, child and wife?
Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won,
The kingdom ours remaineth.”

Even if “they” leave us in peace for a time, there comes a day when we finally do lose everything, when we take our last breath. Everything goes. Except for one thing: Our Christ-connection. That’s what the Bible means with the term Kingdom of God. God’s new regime, new way of dealing with sinners is to get the sinners Christ-connected. And with that Christ-connection come FORGIVENESS, FAITH, FREEDOM. That’s what lasts. Since Christ has got death licked, he can lick anything. And he does.

God’s way of being our KING—forgiveness, faith and freedom—lasts forever. And it’s ours. The kingdom ours remaineth.

That’s the real reason we’re here to celebrate Reformation Day—in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Luther’s Understanding of Law: Lex Charitatis, the Law of Love

Colleagues,

For Reformation day weekend, a treat (no tricks). Law professor Marie Failing reviews Reformation-scholar Gottfried Krodel's just-published (finally!) English translation of Johannes Heckel's classic study of Luther and the law. Originally published in 1953, Heckel's book was "hot stuff" when I arrived for graduate study at the theological faculty at the University of Hamburg, Germany, in 1955.

Both Failing and Krodel, major voices in their respective worlds of work, were blessings in my life a few years later—she as student, he as colleague—when my wife Marie and I got back home from Germany [We had gotten there on HER Fullbright scholarship!] and I began teaching at Valparaiso University.

Heckel's book is heavy stuff, so perk up. Gottfried's fine translation and Marie's deft hand will take you through the forest and you won't get lost. But you may have to back-track once or twice to stay on the trail.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

LUTHER AND THE TWO KINGDOMS: ONE LAWYER'S VIEW

**By Marie A. Failing, Professor, Hamline University School of Law,
Editor of The Journal of Law and Religion**

Luther's views about law have been easy to misunderstand, especially for modern lawyers and others interested in law, who are accustomed to starting with John Austin's definition of law as "the command of the sovereign. . . accepted due to fear of sanction." The continuing debate over the relationship between law and morality resulting from the claims of Austin and other legal positivists has gotten into deep difficulty in an

increasingly morally pluralistic world. More recently, Western lawyers, particularly those from the monotheistic traditions, have been re-exploring natural law as a way to recover the relationship between law and morality. As just examples, one might look at J. Budziszewski's *WRITTEN ON THE HEART: THE CASE FOR NATURAL LAW* (Intervarsity Press, 1997) (A Christian appraisal); David Novak's *NATURAL LAW IN JUDAISM* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); or Anver Emon's recently published *ISLAMIC NATURAL LAW THEORIES* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

Johannes Heckel, a law professor at the University of Munich and member of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, whose jurisprudential research on Luther spanned forty years until his death in 1963, understood these struggles and attempted to correct what he saw as grave misinterpretations of Luther's place in this debate. His major work, *LEX CHARITATIS: A JURISTIC DISQUISITION ON LAW IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARTIN LUTHER* (Eerdmans, 2010) (xxiii, 566 pp.) [Amazon \$26.60], has been finally translated into English by Gottfried Krodel with the collaboration of Henning Falkenstein and Jack Hiller (all three Valparaiso University professors) with the help of Prof. Heckel's son, Martin. In 132 pages of text, plus five separately written appendices on the right of resistance to the empire, the spiritual governance of the secular authority, the two kingdoms doctrine, and ecclesiastical law, Heckel covers Luther's development of his doctrine of divine and human law, the two kingdoms, and the Christian's role in the *politia* (society), marriage, and the church. [There are also 273 (sic!) pp. of footnotes! (es)]

Heckel sets out to disprove what he views as distorted understandings of Luther's view of law that were formulated in reaction to the growth of positivist ecclesiastical law in the church. On one hand, Heckel rejects the reaction of jurist Rudolph Sohm who argued that "law is hostile to the kingdom of

God, a kingdom of freedom and love; law [only] resides in the world. . . [and] the church is the manifestation of God's kingdom on earth and, therefore, has nothing in common with the law." (7) In Heckel's view, that solution pleased evangelical theologians who saw no place for a discussion of law in faith, or a discussion of faith in law; or, indeed, saw spiritual law as contrary to faith, an intrusion into the kingdom of God.

Similarly, Heckel rejected the conclusions of historical theology (mentioning Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch as two major intellectuals who followed them) about Luther's views on natural law. The traditionalists, according to Heckel, wrongly read Luther as simply adopting a "patristic-medieval" concept of natural law, communicated by God to human reason, albeit adjusted to humans' sinful condition after the Fall. The idealists such as Karl Holl also incorrectly saw Luther as the "great innovator" in rejecting natural law for love as a moral norm. Heckel's main attack is on the notion that for Luther, all law is secular, including ecclesiastical law.

The chief structural claim of Heckel's work is that Luther conceived of law in four categories: divine natural law, divine positive law, human natural law and human positive law. However, as much as these forms of law are distinct and separate, they do not work in isolation from each other. God's will, impenetrable as it is, creates righteousness, that is, law. There is no such thing (as in Enlightenment natural law theory or in other religious traditions) as law that is valid apart from the will of God; God can break the secular natural law, even exempting "heroes" from the secular natural law in order to lead the believer to salvation.

In this understanding, however, Luther uses law in a very different way from our modern Austin-shaped imagination: rather than conceiving of divine law as a set of God's oral commands

that in this life we should engage in or refrain from certain conduct "or else," the exercise of divine governance employs means that are exclusively spiritual, the Word and the Spirit, and directed only to believing hearts. Thus, for Luther, God's commandments are radically spiritual; "God does not command anything external." (45) Divine law's only objective is to create "a God-formed will," to form a heart "seized by God's spirit," and the very definition of divine natural law is uncoerced, joyful love that both binds the whole person in complete surrender to God and also assures him or her of God's love.

Divine natural law is universal not in the sense of commanding the same conduct of all persons; but because it emanates from the Creator of law, it addresses all of humankind "in the status of the incorrupt nature," it grasps the human being in his or her totality, it lasts eternally, and it is exhaustive of, and the model for, all law valid before God. (48) Law is "legislated" as the divine will in the form of the Word of God that penetrates the human will that is "resting" or "being drowned" in the will of God. (49) While the divine law demands a work from the Christian, paradoxically, that work is love for the Creator that only God can make possible, not the person. (50)

Complementary to divine natural law is divine positive law, which God instituted after creation to order the communal life of persons in relationship to God through the institutions of marriage and the church. However, these orders are not divine law unless they are used spiritually, i.e., to transform the will into one characterized by perfect love for God and others.

Notably, Luther rejected the idea that the Golden Rule was an expression of the divine natural law, first because it demanded particular work toward others rather than the surrender of the

heart; and second, because it is framed by reference to the self rather than the will of God-the Rule commands us to do to others WHAT WE WOULD HAVE THEM DO UNTO US. (51)

For Luther, such secular natural law, that is, the law relevant to the kingdom of this world such as is characterized by the Golden Rule, is dangerous. To be sure, the secular natural law is the work of God in the world and a "precious jewel," reflecting human solidarity, the membership of each in the human community, and the mutual responsibility of all to serve each other (save "the inevitable minimum of love for the self") for the common good.

Yet, human sin inevitably corrupts the secular natural law. That is so first because the human awareness of true love for God and the neighbor becomes "weak, dim and crude" as a result of sin. (55) Second, human beings elevate their own righteousness under this law to the supreme position; they believe that their rational interpretation of the divine law constitutes a true search for God, and become arrogantly confident of their ability to "re-think God's thoughts." (56)

Secular positive law, the fourth category, including the Decalogue, carries out the moral power of the secular natural law. With God's presence, it can execute "divine punishment in the kingdom of the divine wrath," serve as a tool of God's mercy, and exist as "a mask of the divine governance over the world" so long as it does not overflow its jurisdiction.

This very different way of understanding law leads to what might be considered shocking conclusions to the modern mind. For example, in Luther's view, the Decalogue should be viewed as human law, as "Moses' codification" of the natural law, made weaker by its mediators (Moses and the angels) so the people could bear it. The Decalogue, as a product of fear and not

freedom, is neither life-giving nor clear; it is binding only insofar as it expresses natural law, and it can be supplemented by other rules emanating from the natural law.

Indeed, for true Christians, the sovereignty of the Ten Commandments is abolished in favor of a life in which obedience to law does not generate righteousness, but rather righteousness in Christ makes it possible to obey the spiritual law. Or, Martin Luther King Jr. notwithstanding, we moderns might be skeptical of Luther's argument that we should primarily oppose tyrannical government with active spiritual resistance in prayer. Or we might look askance at his view that marriage is at once a divine work that safeguards morality and a spiritual perversion within the jurisdiction of secular authorities in the fallen world, which led him to conclude that though lifelong monogamy was the "model for a well-organized commonwealth," the natural law permitted human authorities to grant dispensations from that model in cases of need, especially for "weak Christians." (74, 76)

While Heckel's text does not necessarily simplify the complexity of Luther's thinking about the four types of law, as a non-theologian I found helpful its attempt to structure the relationship between these types and uses of law in Luther's thinking in this summary form, and to place Luther's views in contrast to those of his medieval counterparts about the relationship between natural and revealed law and human secular law. In addition, Heckel's description of Luther's views on a number of modern contested legal issues, such as the right to rebel against unjust authority and the moral propriety of divorce or polygamy, will test the modern reader's assumptions.

Of course, the Lutheran witness tells us that we should also expect shocking and even ironic contrasts in comparing the work and the lives of significant intellectuals like Heckel, whose

work has been considered ground-breaking. I could not close this review without remarking on one such irony: Heckel describes Luther's view of the right of the Christian to oppose, with arms, the work of the tyrannus universalis, the grand or world tyrant, who goes beyond craving power over land and people, beyond "egotistically transgressing the institutional or the substantive secular natural law in individual instances." Rather, the grand tyrant refuses to acknowledge any natural law that God gave to man, instead claiming sovereignty for his "own kingdom, which he strives to extend over body and soul," placing "himself outside of all law connected with God, and above it." The grand tyrant is an outlaw before God whose sentence should be immediately executed by God's people, who should also fight his assistants "as one fights robbers or foreign enemies" because public law has simply ended. (113) That page must have been difficult for Heckel to write, accused as he now is of lending his work to the intellectual case for anti-Semitism that helped to justify the holocaust perpetrated by Adolph Hitler, the grand tyrant himself.