

# **“Street Priest” in Vancouver, DTES**

Colleagues,

Folks in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada’s jewel on the Pacific coast, all know what the initials DTES mean. It’s the “Downtown East Side,” the Skid Row of this marvelous creme-de-la-creme metropolis. Lutheran pastor Brian Heinrich is known as the “street priest” for the halt, the maimed, the losers, the rejects, in DTES. Alfred DePew from the VANCOUVER OBSERVER recently “found” Brian on the DTES streets and has now completed a three-part series on his discovery.

[Wikipedia tells us: The Vancouver Observer is an online newspaper that publishes Vancouvercentric news and features daily. It was founded in 2006 by Linda Solomon as an online platform where local Vancouverites engage each other and discuss the issues affecting them and their city.]

Brian has appeared earlier in these ThTh posts—six times by my count over the years. He alerted me to the VO coverage. I’ve learned that when Brian told Alfred of his seminary days at Seminex, Alfred told him that he himself was a student at Webster University here in St. Louis during the Sturm-und-Drang of Seminex days, and was cheering from the sidelines. His own reportage on the Seminex theme—and possibly Brian’s too—isn’t quite the way I remember it, but I’ve made no changes in the three-part text. Here it is.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **PART ONE**

### **Heinrich and the Lutheran Urban Mission Society in Vancouver's DTES**

**Alfred DePew**

**Posted: July 31, 2010**

Vancouver's Lutheran Urban Mission Society has its roots in St. Louis. That's where Pastor Brian Heinrich, one of LUMS' founders, went to seminary some 30 years ago. He was educated and inspired by a small group of progressive theologians who, having been censured by the Lutheran Missouri Synod, formed Concordia Seminary in Exile, or Seminex, in 1974.

"These were the bright young stars of the 60s and 70s," says Heinrich, "many of them educated in Europe and trained in the historical-critical method, which put Scripture into historical context."

And to understand the controversy, we must look precisely at that-its historical context: the Prussian Union of 1817, by which King Frederick William III merged the Lutheran and the Reformed (Calvinist) Church in Prussia.

"Many Lutherans didn't want to be forced to merge," Heinrich explains, "and so they fled to the New World, with the psychological mindset of 'we have the truth, and we have to protect it.'" A viewpoint which informed both sides during the Missouri Synod controversy at Concordia Seminary 157 years later.

After repeated reprimands and several failed efforts at reconciliation, 45 of the seminary's 50 faculty members and a majority of their students walked out in protest to form

## Concordia Seminary in Exile.

"They left with the processional cross and the shirts on their backs," says Heinrich. By the time Heinrich attended Seminex, the seminary had established itself in a storefront on Grand Avenue and was operating under the auspices of the Jesuits of St. Louis University.

"A reversal of the Reformation," says Heinrich, chuckling. "Lutherans are like Jesuits," he explains. "We're the protestant equivalent. Grounded in deep learning, with a commitment to theology-and action. Because they had been exiled from the church body and had no parishes, [Seminex students] had to develop alternative ministry styles. And that's the direct link from there to here."

When Heinrich returned to Vancouver 15 years ago, he noticed that there were no Lutheran churches in the downtown city core. "It's not that the downtown eastside needed to be Christianized; it was that the church needed to be engaged." When he mentioned that to the church hierarchy, they all nodded, and, as Brian says, "that was about it."

"So I called a meeting with people in the community, and we founded LUMS as a separate not-for-profit organization-grass roots founded and supported. We were building out of nothing. I had to convert the churches: here was Lazarus at our doorstep, Christ clothed in the poor. I had to coax Lutherans who are internally focused into external, politically challenging situations. I went out to churches and took youth groups around the downtown eastside. It was intense and demanding."

At first, LUMS had no office. Everything was on Brian's cell phone. He worked part-time as a street priest for St. James Anglican Church Community Services until they ran out of funding. Next LUMS was invited to First United Church on Gore

and Hastings, where they stayed for eleven years. Then came 18 months at Christ Church Cathedral. And then last November, LUMS moved to its own space at 360 Jackson Avenue.

LUMS is run on individual donations, not church structure. "Financial support for churches is shrinking," says Heinrich. LUMS doesn't depend upon the church for its survival. "Individuals of conscience believe in our work, and this gives us broader support and keeps us truly independent."

The Labatt Beer Employee Association, a dating service for young adults, and schools all send volunteers to serve food to the poor at the LUMS sponsored soup kitchen once a month.

"It's the church as organic community vs. the church as facility," he says.

In Brian's theology, contemplation, scriptural study, and action are inseparable. His passion for social justice is fueled by ecumenical impulses. Heinrich has always had close ties to Catholics and Anglicans engaged in the downtown eastside: the Sisters of the Atonement, Father Ken Forester, and members of the Catholic Worker Movement. He preaches regularly at [the Anglican] Christ Church Cathedral.

"The Eucharist is the heart of what I do," says Heinrich. "Each Tuesday, when I walk to the Cathedral to celebrate mass, I pick up everyone's woundedness and carry it with me to the altar."

To learn more, visit LUMS' website: <http://www.lums.ca/>

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## **PART TWO**

**In Canada's poorest neighborhood, a pastor serves**

## **mass and lunch**

**Alfred DePew**

**Posted: Aug 3rd, 2010**

The fourth Saturday of every month, the Lutheran Urban Mission Society serves a hot meal at 373 East Cordova Street. Before the gate opens, Pastor Brian Heinrich serves mass to the volunteers at St. Paul's next door.

Today, the volunteers are from a protestant youth group in Burnaby, 15-20 of them, mostly teenagers, and not quite sure what to make of it all. They are in unfamiliar territory-Canada's poorest neighborhood, a catholic church-and before them stands the imposing figure of a pastor well over six feet tall, sporting a Mohawk, and with both earlobes full of cobalt blue spiral earrings.

Brian invites them to come closer, into the front pews.

"I need your help," he says. "I'm not going to do all the work here. I want you to listen to the text. Then I'm going to ask you some questions."

A boy gets up to read from Jeremiah.

"For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, ... then I will dwell with you in this place, ...."

Then a girl comes forward to read from Matthew, the parable of the man who sowed good seed and his enemy who came and sowed weeds among the wheat.

"What do you hear God saying to us?" asks Heinrich. "Come on, you have to help me."

There's a long, awkward silence. Heinrich can't wait too long. There are people to feed.

"The stuff that we do in here in God's beautiful house," says Brian, "has everything to do with our everyday lives. If worship is separate from what's happening outside, as if our lives have no connection to this source-don't think God doesn't notice that. Many say the church ought not to concern itself with politics. But Jeremiah says, act justly with one another. Do right things in the world. If we make war or take advantage of others-is that connected to what we do here in church? I think not."

"And the parable of sowing seeds-what's that about?" he asks.

Again a silence, but this time one of the volunteers ventures an answer, and from that follows a bit of a conversation, though cautious.

"Does God want us to be fruitful?"

"Yes."

"Do we want to be wheat, or do we want to be weeds?"

"Wheat."

"Sometimes it's too easy to say 'we are wheat, and they are weeds.' The truth is we are each both. It'd be easy to pull up the weeds and burn them. That judgment is not ours. We're all mixed fields. The time we're in is full of opportunity. Seize the time and be fruitful. The parts of us can be whole and integrated as we live out in the world."

Heinrich concludes by acknowledging his listeners.

"This way of preaching may be different from how it's done in

your church," he says. "Thank you for being gracious."

Before serving communion, Brian says, "This is preparation for what we are about to do next door. Here we can practice generosity as we offer each other the body and blood of Christ."

Next door, we take our places. Everybody has been assigned a role: food server, plate carrier, table wiper, dish washer. They need someone to circulate with coffee, so that's what I'm assigned. I have two plastic pitchers, one for black coffee, the other for coffee with milk.

Brian opens the gate and lets in the first 43 people with free tickets in hand. Its a bit chaotic at first-who to serve what first? Some get coffee first. I pour coffee into cups for people who really want juice. Some don't speak English, so I lean over and let them look into the jug.

"Juice over here," I call out. We are angling around each other and there are some near misses.

Pasta with meat sauce. Pasta without meat sauce. Juice. Coffee. A bag of three cookies. Ice cream in back and a small bag of fruit to take home.

"Coffee!" I head over to a table. "Not black. With milk."

"Anyone for black coffee here?" I ask. "Yes? OK. I'll be right back with the coffee with milk."

"Where's the sugar?"

"Already on the table. Right there."

"Thanks."

"More juice over here," I call out and then head back to the counter to get the coffee with milk. But which table wanted it?

And someone over there hasn't been served a plate yet. Where's a food server? Never mind. Not my job. They can handle it.

Not everyone is finished when Brian lets in the second group. Some in the first group have shoveled pasta into plastic bags they brought and are calling for more.

The pace picks up with each new wave of people. I's hot. People are impatient. They're hungry. Also gracious, grateful, and obliging. The kids from Burnaby are steady, unflappable.

Each seating seems a little more chaotic than the one before, and yet we begin to meet the increased confusion with a kind of grace, a rhythm in our bodies, as we learn to work together as a team by instinct.

"Hey!" a man shouts. "Hey. She's had three meals! She's stealing."

When I go over to him, he grabs my arm and pulls me toward him.

"It's those Chinese," he says. "Rob you blind. Tell Brian to stop letting them in. It's not right. It's just not right."

"I'll tell him," I say, and pour him a cup of coffee.

When I'm near the door, I peer out to see if the crowd is thinning. All I see is more people.

Then suddenly there's no more pasta.

"We're not out! We're not out!" shouts one of the cooks. "There's more cooking!"

A grim irritation settles over the room.

"Welcome," I tell the newcomers. "Have a seat."



I keep pouring coffee.

Someone brings out the new pot of pasta, and the servers are at it again until, after eight seatings, we have fed more than 300 people.

As the crowd thins out and we start cleaning up, a woman approaches me. She's wearing a hoody and several bright scarves. She unwinds one of them, a fine, delicately coloured one made of something like silk, and presses it into my hand.

"Give this to Brian," she says.

I thank her and assure her I'll pass it on to him.

"Tell him it's from Luella. He doesn't know who I am."

"He will, Luella. Keep coming back," I say, "and he'll know you."

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## **PART THREE**

**Posted: Aug 8, 2010**

**<http://www.vancouverobserver.com/blogs/betweenus/2010/08/08/called-serve-canadian-church-unconventional-pastor-brian-heinrich-engages>**

Someone has written "Welcome" on the chalkboard just inside the front door of the Lutheran Urban Mission Society offices on Jackson Avenue. Pastor Brian Heinrich offers me a seat underneath a verse from Scripture, I John 3:17-18: "... if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth."

On another wall, I see a poster of Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, who was gunned down while celebrating mass the day after he had given a sermon in which he called upon "Salvadoran soldiers, as Christians, to obey God's higher order and to stop carrying out the government's repression and violations of basic human rights."

Brian puts the kettle on for tea and then goes in search of a guy who signed up for a yoga lesson with a teacher who is waiting in the chapel.

The walls are pale and fresh, the atmosphere bright and serene. In the chapel down the hall, I find icons of Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; South Africa's Steve Biko; and Kateri Tekakwitha, a Mohawk-Algonquian woman who converted to Christianity in the 1600s and was later canonized by the Catholic Church.

Brian comes back from the apartment building next door, having had trouble getting in to find the man he was looking for. "Security," he says. "It's not like they don't know me. They see me every day!" The man spaced out the lesson. Brian apologizes to the yoga teacher and asks him to come back at two, when he's sure the next person on the sign-up sheet will be here.

Once we are seated at the oak table in the chapel, Heinrich continues his story. After completing his studies at Seminex in St. Louis, he was called to a church in Oliver, BC, a German community not far from Penticton. He was 29. The elders approached him, clicked their heels, bowed slightly at the waist, and addressed him as "Herr Pastor." Brian was taken aback. He extended his hand and said, "Call me Brian." The elders were bewildered.

Heinrich would write out his sermons in English, have someone translate them into German, and then spend three days working on

his pronunciation. Though he'd been raised understanding German in his neighborhood in south Vancouver, he usually answered his grandparents in English.

"It was my first parish," says Heinrich. "When I graduated, I was a bit rigid, orthodox." He was first and foremost a theologian. "Oliver was a good match for me. They loved me and took care of me. They taught me to be more pastoral, more human. Later, when I was in New York, they sent me boxes of Okanogan jams and home-knit socks. Many of them are still in touch 25 years later."

From Oliver, BC, Brian was called to Manhattan, St. Luke's Church near Times Square on 46th Street. "Everything in New York shocked me," he says. "I was a book learning person up to that point pretty much." Once there, he ran a soup kitchen and a homeless shelter at the height of the HIV crisis. "Men were dying every week," says Heinrich. "They were like lepers. Everyone was afraid. We served meals with real utensils, nothing disposable. We were affirming their humanity, not just feeding them."

Brian's ministry grew to include hospice work. By the end of his time in New York, he served as the chaplain at Bailey House on Christopher Street.

"AIDS continues to be with me through my ministry-at Dr. Peter and St. Paul's Hospital. I'm often called to be with people in the last moments of their lives, praying and singing with them, holding them as they die. It's an honour. It shapes me."

As compelling as his work was in New York, Heinrich had always believed that he was called to serve the Canadian church. And yet when the first call came from a bishop asking him to come to White Horse, Brian declined. "I thought and prayed and said 'no.'" Six weeks later, the bishop called, asking him to

reconsider, and this time the answer was yes.

It was time to come home to Canada.

After a year or so in White Horse, he returned to Vancouver and settled in Strathcona. While working at a L'Arche community for the disabled, Heinrich started to become engaged in the downtown eastside, which eventually led him to form LUMS.

"The people I've worked with have changed me," says Brian. "That was Monsenor Romero's experience too-he was converted by the poor in El Salvador."

When Heinrich was asked to preach one Sunday at Christ Church Cathedral, he chose usury as his subject. He was pretty sure he wouldn't be asked back. But he was-and precisely because of that first sermon.

Brian's preaching style is unconventional, more of a conversation than a sermon. He maintains that it's not just his job to interpret biblical stories. "I speak freely," he says. "It's a dialogue. I'm not so much a preacher as the conductor of an orchestra-a living thing-the spirit is there. This is a living community, struggling with the text."

His style shows the influence of liberation theology and his experience preaching on Manhattan's Lower East Side in a storefront mission. A number of his parishioners were Afro-American and spoke up automatically during the sermon. "It was affirming, joyful," says Heinrich. "You knew they were there." And at some point, Brian began to answer them from the pulpit, "discerning the Word together," as he puts it. "I'm still responsible for proclaiming the Word, and I let spirit move as well."

In February of 2008, the house that he shared with his partner,

Nathan, burned down while they were on holiday in Mexico. "The fire has been very difficult," says Brian. "The house was my place of refuge, its garden an immediate experience of life and breath. It was also a place of hospitality and welcome, with a chapel where I'd serve weekly Eucharist. Being in exile has connected me even more to the people in the downtown eastside. Your whole world is turned upside down. Where to sleep and do laundry? I have that much more understanding and empathy for challenges of the homeless."

From time to time Heinrich returns to preach in the church he grew up in, Martin Luther Evangelical Lutheran Church at 46th and Fraser. It can be challenging. "The old German people tell me 'we had nothing when we got here. We worked hard and pulled ourselves up. Why don't those people just work hard and pull themselves up?' It's always dicey."

Heinrich explains that the circumstances of life have so wounded the homeless, they don't have the same choices.

"I don't think the old people get it," says Heinrich, "but they've come several times to put on the meal. And they see some of the same people and get to know their names and establish relationship-that's the conversion."

Over the past 15 years, a community has grown up around Brian Heinrich and his ministry. The Lutheran Urban Mission Society remains vibrant, even as the church is in recession.

"That's the work of a mission," says Heinrich, "to be self-sustaining. The One we worship is incarnate in the poorest place in Canada. It's a gift that the poorest are here to prove what this city can be."

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# Doubt and Certainty in “A Lutheran Christian Life for Today”

Colleagues,

I have a poor track record in getting letters to the editor published in our ELCA magazine, THE LUTHERAN. Size-wise they are always too long, and in substance regularly quite op-ed-ish. So for this first ThTh post in August 2010 here's what the August 2010 issue of our magazine churned up in me with its one-page article under that caption above offering in the sub-head “An appreciation for doubt.” Given past rejection slips, I doubt that I should even bother to send it. So it comes your way on a hot summer day.

Maybe one of you should “say something.” For the topic of doubt and certainty is not trivial. And when you propose to be offering a distinctively “Lutheran” perspective, you've got some criteria to respect. But that doesn't happen here. Nor did it happen four years ago when the March 2006 issue of THE LUTHERAN offered four feature articles under an even feistier caption—“In Praise of Doubt.” [Check <https://crossings.org/thursday/2006/thur042706.shtml> for that one, if interested.] This time around THE LUTHERAN gets no closer to those criteria for that subject than it did in 2006. So don't believe what it tells you. THE LUTHERAN word on doubt and certainty is something else.

Peace and Joy!

## **To the Editor, THE LUTHERAN**

The August 2010 issue urges readers (p.3) to “appreciate doubt” and to get rid of their yen for “certainty.” It’s the first offering in a series under the rubric “A Lutheran Christian Life for Today.” That “L” adjective nowadays is in debate throughout world-wide Lutheranism. So what IS a Lutheran perspective on doubt and certainty? Page three gives us THE LUTHERAN’s answer. Question: By what criteria does the p.3 perspective deserve the “L” adjective?

The author is going after fundamentalist rigidity, know-it-all folks, who have no doubts at all and are “certain” about everything in Christian faith and life. Granted, he’s not pooh-poohing fiducial faith or confident trust in God. But concern for certainty sure takes a beating. Put mildly, his brush-strokes are way too wide.

E.g., there is “non-fundie” rigidity too on this one, know-it-all folks—also in the ELCA—who are just as rigid in their own brand of certainty as the fundies may be. But that’s another topic.

Vexing in this article is that certainty itself – with no qualifications – becomes the whipping-boy. There’s no hint that there might be a valid kind of certainty-seeking in what the header calls “A Lutheran Christian life for today.” That sort of certainty, that confident trust in God, doesn’t presume to know or speak everything about God (what Luther sometimes termed the “hidden” God, sometimes the “nude” God) of glory-theology. Instead rightful certainty-seeking – precisely for Lutheran Christian life today – arises from the theology of the cross.

Here faith is not know-it-all, but a confident trust in God's promise arising from Good Friday and Easter. But that too gets brushed away on p.3.

Certainty becomes a real villain on that page. It is "unneeded . . . seductive . . . impoverishes faith . . . very un-Christian . . . the opposite of faith." The very last words of the article urge us "to bring the arrogance of certainty to its knees." And with certainty now having no leg to stand on, former certainty-seekers are encouraged to get on the doubt-bandwagon. Why? Because "doubt is really quite beautiful. For too long we have been denying doubt the respect it deserves."

For a second opinion on this subject, a genuine "op ed," listen to these sentences from Luther. They come from his 1525 debate with Erasmus, super-scholar of the 16th century, who also praised doubt and pooh-poohed certainty-seeking as Luther's hang-up.

"My dear Erasmus . . . To start with . . . you say that 'you find so little satisfaction in assertions that you would readily take up the Sceptics' [=a school of philosophical doubters in Greek antiquity] position wherever the authority of Holy Scriptures and the Church's decisions permit.' That is the outlook which appeals to you."

"To take no pleasure in assertions is not the mark of a Christian heart; indeed, one must delight in assertions to be a Christian at all."

"Away with Sceptics . . . from the company of us Christians! Let us have people who will assert, people twice as inflexible as the Stoics! Take the Apostle Paul—how often does he call for that "full assurance" [Luther uses Paul's Greek term "pleerophoria," appearing many times in Paul's epistles], which is, simply, an assertion of conscience, of the highest degree of



certainty and conviction.”

“Nothing is more familiar or characteristic among Christians than assertion. Take away assertion, and you take away Christianity.”

“I am the biggest fool of all for wasting my time and words on something that is clearer to see than the sun. What Christian can endure the idea that we should deprecate assertions?”

“You wish that you had liberty to be a sceptic! What Christian could talk like that? . . . For uncertainty is the most miserable thing in the world.”

Luther concludes: “My dear Erasmus . . . leave us free to make assertions, and to find in assertions our satisfaction and delight; and you may applaud your Sceptics . . . till Christ calls you too! The Holy Spirit is no Sceptic, and the things he has written in our hearts are not doubts or opinions, but assertions—surer and more certain than sense and life itself.”

Enough already.

That “appreciation for doubt” in this August issue is the first in a coming series, “A Lutheran Christian life for today.” Which of these two authors—with their 100% contrary proposals on doubt and certainty—should we heed for living THE LUTHERAN Christian life today? Next question: What are we likely to get next month as this series unfolds? What will be the sources, the criteria, that inform that “L” adjective? Ought they not be identified? Seems to me that is not an unfair question.

Edward Schroeder  
St. Louis, Missouri

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# **Robert Bertram, Carl Braaten and the ELCA on Universal Salvation**

Colleagues,

Some time ago Scott Jurgens, ELCA pastor in Idaho, (Seminex graduate, 1980) asked me if I had seen the article on universal salvation in the ELCA's collection of faith statements. No, I hadn't. Carl Braaten, he told me, was the major voice in this statement, and what Carl said didn't coincide with what Bob Bertram had taught him. So I asked him to dig deeper, write it up and send it to me. Last week he did. It's good. Herewith I send it on to you.

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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## **DOES THE ELCA TEACH UNIVERSAL SALVATION?**

**By Scott J. Jurgens**

**Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Lewiston, Idaho**

For those who, as Luther would say, "have" Christ by faith, there is the joy and promise of a hope beyond all hopes. The peace and joy that we "have" is salvation and righteousness through Jesus Christ. And yet this peace and joy for the Christian also suggests a dilemma: why do not all among the "dear disbelievers" share in the peace and joy of this gift?

This dilemma is also at the forefront of Robert W. Bertram's set of theses entitled "U is for Universality," in his posthumously published book, *A TIME FOR CONFESSING* (Eerdmans, 2008), 172-184. His very first thesis introduces the problem:

*"Probably no feature of the Christian gospel has been so troubling to modern Christians as the way in which that gospel limits salvation to those who believe in Christ." (172) He goes on to describe how this "limit" is a scandal, an embarrassment to Christians, but also creates a "longing" in us, a longing that might make us say, "if only we could just give this gift to everyone." These feelings and desires are summed up well in theses 11 through 14 (173).*

But the longing that he mentions has made its way into the ELCA in a big way; however, it might go unnoticed. This is because an article that deals with this same question of Christ's "universality" is buried deeply in the databases of the ELCA's faith statements. To find it you have to go to the [elca.org](http://elca.org) webpage and then click on the links in this path: Home>>What We Believe>>New or Returning to Church?>>Dig Deeper>>Salvation.

This article on Salvation had its origin in two articles written by Carl E. Braaten published in the December 1980 and June 1981 issues of *LCA PARTNERS*. The first article was entitled "The Universal Meaning of Jesus Christ" and the second was a rejoinder response to a Pastor H. Gerhardt Kugler who took issue with Braaten. These articles were condensed, edited, and redacted in such a way as to bring about the ELCA position on salvation.

I took this condensed article to an ecumenical pastors' meeting for discussion. One pastor described the article as showing "ambiguity with a universalist wish." Is he correct? To answer this it might be good to compare and contrast this article with

a few of Bertram's theses and the Lutheran Confessions.

I think both the ELCA and Bertram would agree that there is something universal about salvation in the New Testament. But Bertram would not promote "universalism" or "universal salvation." I think this is why he uses the term "universality" when presenting his theses. The ELCA salvation article, on the other hand, promotes "universalism" when it says:

*"The Christian hope for salvation, whether for the believing few or the unbelieving many, is grounded in the person and meaning of Christ alone . . . There is a universalist thrust in the New Testament, particularly in Paul's theology. How else can we read passages such as 'for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ' (1 Cor. 15:22)?" (5th paragraph)"...If Jesus is the Lord and Savior, he is the universal Lord and Savior,...not merely my personal Lord and Savior...there is a large hope for salvation. . .for all people whenever or wherever they might have lived and no matter how religious or irreligious they may have proved to be themselves. It is clearly God's announced will that all people shall be saved and come to the knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4)." (8th paragraph)*

In making reference to 1 Timothy 2:4 the Salvation article is pointing out that God shall save all people. But the verse from 1 Timothy really says that God "desires" that everyone be saved, implying that not all actually will be saved.

Bertram comes closer to a proper understanding of the universal aspect of Jesus Christ when he says in thesis 22, "what for [Christians] distinguished Jesus from all other saviors was precisely that he was for everyone, not for some privileged few. He differed from all others exactly by his being for all others." (174). The agreement between Bertram and the ELCA

article is that both say that Christ is “for everyone.” The difference for Bertram is that salvation is received only by those who believe in Christ (cf. again thesis 1, quoted above).

Yet the subject of belief in Christ, or faith, does not go unmentioned in the ELCA article. Paragraph 7 begins, “But what of faith? Isn’t faith necessary for salvation?” The rest of the paragraph really does not give a clear answer to this question but rather gives a definition of faith and salvation through faith alone:

*“To say we are saved by faith alone means we let God-in-Christ do all the saving that needs to be done, apart from any works we can perform. . . If I confess that God has saved me, a lost and condemned sinner, whom else can he not save? Faith is precisely awareness that God’s accepting love reaches out to all sinners, even to me. Faith is the opening of heart and mind to the universal grace and goodness of God.” (7th paragraph)*

This section, although emphasizing the importance of God’s grace and love being offered to all, tends to dilute faith into an “awareness of what God has done.” I almost liken it to the knowledge of history (*fides historica*) mentioned in Apology IV which apparently is how the papists were defining faith at the time:

*“But the faith that justifies is not only a knowledge of history; it is to assent to the promise of God, in which forgiveness of sins and justification are bestowed freely on account of Christ. To avoid the suspicion that it is merely knowledge, we will add further that to have faith is to desire and to receive the offered promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification.” (Kolb & Wengert, 128.48) “But faith signifies not merely a knowledge of history but the faith which assents to the promise, as Paul clearly testifies when he says*

*[Rom. 4:16] righteousness 'depends on faith, in order that the promise may...be guaranteed.' For he says that only faith can accept the promise." (128.50)*

Here there are clear differences between the ELCA article and Apology IV. Faith is more than an "awareness of what God has done," more than an "opening of the mind and heart to God's universal grace and goodness." The faith that the Apology talks about is trust in the promise, an assent, or as Tappert's translation renders it, an acceptance of the promise – a grasping of the promise. And what promise is that? Not the promise that God is universal with God's love, although God is, but the promise that our sins are forgiven and that we are justified because of Christ. (Ap. IV.43) The question is whether the ELCA gives Luther's *glaubst du, hast du* ("what you believe, you have") enough emphasis.

But even if we were to accept the ELCA's definition of faith, and since it does refer to salvation by faith alone, you would then think that the article would be saying that we are saved by our awareness of God reaching out to all sinners or saved by an open heart and mind to the universal grace and goodness of God. But surprisingly the article leaves this question open ended. For the article ends this way:

*"Will, then, all people be saved in the end? We must say with Braaten, 'We do not...know the answer. (That) is stored up in the mystery of God's own future. All (God) has let us know in advance is that he will judge the world according to the measure of his grace and love made known in Jesus Christ, which is ultimately greater than the fierceness of his wrath or the hideousness of our sin.'" (11th paragraph)*

So, according to the ELCA article all we are left with is

uncertainty as to who is going to be saved. The only thing we can be certain about, through our awareness and open hearts and minds, is that God's accepting love reaches out to all sinners.

Fortunately, though, we have other writings that proclaim the gospel clearly. We have the letters of St. Paul and the Augsburg Confession Art. IV, which clearly states that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our works but we become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith, "when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight as St. Paul says in Romans 3 and 4."

So, both the ELCA article and Bertram agree that the gift of God's grace is offered to all. Universality, yes; but universal salvation, probably not. For faith (trust in the promise, trust in Christ) must be present to receive the gift and guarantee it.

It might be better to put it this way, as Michael Hoy, the editor of A TIME FOR CONFESSING helped me to understand: The ELCA statement might be OK as far as it goes, but Bertram does that which the ELCA statement does not. He affirms the universality of Jesus but also recognizes that not everyone wants it. It is kind of like the Pharisees at the door complaining about the company Christ keeps. Bertram explains this especially in theses 35-43. In thesis 42 Bertram says that those who label themselves the "righteous ones" exclude themselves due to their own scandalized reaction to the gospel's universal invitation. It may not be true that all disbelievers are outright rejectful but pondering the promise-as did the men at Athens (and Nicodemus in John 3?) who said, "We want to hear more about this." (Acts 17:32) But it is true that Jesus is still universal in promise, even if not all care to share it.

And so the scandal, the embarrassment, and the dilemma of the limits of salvation continue. Which means that our Christian longing for the whole world to be saved continues. Yet Bertram reminds us that the believer does not stand idly by. His concluding sections on Intercession, Vicarious Repentance, and Vicarious Doxology give us clues as to how we serve the “dear disbeliever.” My favorite theses are these:

*“99. In the very midst of these dear disbelievers, not off to the side or above them, are Christ’s believers, the world’s cheering section.”*100. And the believers cheer and compliment and approve, not deceitfully but for good reason. And their praise is not only in the dear disbelievers’ stead but is directed to the disbelievers themselves, dears that they are.

*“101. ‘For from now on,’ as one Christian said for the rest of them, ‘we regard no one from a human point of view.’*

*“102. Neither are believers above being surprised, least of all about their own fate, let alone the fate of others.”*

So we trust God. We pray and hope that the gift of faith may take hold of those who do not believe. And may we be surprised. Come, Lord Jesus. Come, Holy Spirit; for us and for them. Amen

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## **Demythologization, Theology of the Cross and Christ’s Virgin**



# Birth

Colleagues,

For the academic year 1968-69 our family moved from Valparaiso University in Indiana to St. Louis, Missouri, for my one-year stint as guest-professor at Concordia Seminary. It was the first year of a proposed ongoing professor-exchange between the two schools. The fact that it ceased after that first year has been variously interpreted. Two years later (1970 after 14 years at Valparaiso) I did receive a call—and accepted it—to join the Concordia faculty. That lasted for less than three years as the Wars of Missouri rolled over the seminary and Seminex emerged from the rubble in February 1974.

Today's ThTh post is the item, mentioned last week, that Fred Danker found as he was reducing his archival accumulations. It's a paper—from that year as guest-prof—a paper of which I have no memory, that I presented to a joint meeting of the Biblical and systematic theology departments at Concordia Seminary. Even apart from all the foreign words (which I'll try to put into English), it's laden with chutzpah. I was the new kid on the block. I was only 38 years old. Here it is.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## Memorandum

**From:** E. H. Schroeder

**To:** Exegetical and Systematic Dept. Staffs

**Re:** Next Wednesday's Joint Meeting of the Two

## Depts.

Here are my reflections on the subject “Demythologization, \_Theologia Crucis\_[=theology of the cross], and Christ’s Virgin Birth,” to serve as grist for our discussion on Wednesday. If you can read this before then, we won’t have to take meeting time to do that.

The need for demythologization is usually specified by calling attention to the fact that the writers of antiquity (Biblical writers included) sought to engage in “God-talk” by using human grammar, logic, and rhetoric for reality-referents that are exterior to man’s operational and envisionable universe, exterior to what Bultmann labels “das Vorfindliche, das Verfügbare” [= 2 German terms for what we find at hand, what’s available to us]. The term God in such God-talk is applied to a referent that is viewed as exterior to terrestrial reality. This can be envisioned as temporal exteriority (eschatology-as-time is \_totaliter aliter\_ [=totally different] to normal history-as-time) or as spatial exteriority (the long Western tradition of a super-nature above and qualitatively different from normal nature).

In the language of the scriptures the referent for most (perhaps all) God-talk is not envisioned in this kind of exteriority. Perhaps it is the implicit or explicit presupposition of the creator/creation matrix which renders the Biblical authors unreceptive to the above \_totaliter aliter\_ model, since for them the creator/creation matrix of thought does not \_separate\_ the two realities, but intimately \_connects\_ them to each other. In response to the previous paragraph, they tend simply to say: That’s not the way it is. God is not on his own so exterior to the world; the world is not on its own so god-less.

In the perspective of the first paragraph above it is the exception when God comes into man’s sphere – whether that sphere

is envisioned as a finite space or a finite time. For the Biblical authors the opposite is the case. For them the \_given\_ is that the creator is normally here down on the ground, in, with, and under the components of his creation. THE question for them is not: Is God really here or not? And is that even conceivable? but, What is God up to? What \_opus\_ [=work] is God doing? Illustrative of this functioning presupposition, it seems to me, is the way Amos presents the upcoming famine of the words of God (8:11f.) or Paul's way on Mars Hill of presenting his thesis on God's proximity.

The god-referent in the rhetoric of the demythers is the god which Luther designated the subject matter of \_theologia gloriae\_ [=theology of glory]. Much of the medieval tradition envisioned God as portrayed in the first paragraph above. The \_gloria\_ of that theology which vexed Luther was not merely the distortions of triumphalist ecclesiology or razzle-dazzle divinity, but rather the whole frame of reference that relegated God "by nature" into a \_totaliter aliter\_ realm. It took God in \_principle\_ out of the world and thereby encouraged man literally to "work out his own salvation", but without the "fear and trembling" which the apostle originally added – added because he saw it and said it "like it really was".

And the way it really was was \_theologia crucis\_. For Luther this term capsuled the Biblical way of talking about God from the very outset. It was not confined to Paul's perspective in I Cor. whence Luther admittedly had gotten his contrasting terms. \_Crucis\_ here to be sure is a reference to Calvary, but an expanding reference. To wit, on Good Friday we finally see (if we have been missing it all along before this) what theology is all about, what God is about, what He is up to. In the crucified Christ we see that God acts in creation in contradiction to what men naturally and reasonably expect of Him. What they expect, of course, is cast in some kind of \_theologia gloriae\_ – with a God

who is “by nature” extra-terrestrial, a God to whom all the super- and omni- predicates automatically apply. But this is not the “God (who) was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.”

Now of course even those theologies whose basic model is a \_theologia gloriae\_ do present the god of their theology getting into the affairs of men and of the world. But that fact itself usually constitutes the central problem for their theology to cope with. Thus it seems to me that the problem of demythologization is built right into every \_theologia gloriae\_. It is that theology’s central question. Perhaps it is its only question.

Not so \_theologia crucis\_. Because its model operates with the premise that God is (by definition?) operational in, with, and under his creation, it may not even have to wrestle with the demythologization issue at all – or if so, in a considerably different way. Let’s take a look at the issue of the virgin birth of our Lord.

For the demyther Jesus’ virgin birth is a classical example of mythological rendering. It is extra-natural interference in the normal procedures of bi-sexual generation. We have here an instance of encounter between the two spheres – god’s and man’s. A typical demyther’s rendering would admit the physical impossibility of human parthenogenesis and call attention to the clearly mythological character of the Biblical witness. What Matthew and Luke intend, of course, is as follows: In rhetoric that speaks of an intrusion from outside nature, they were witnessing to the unique eschatological “X” that characterizes this Jesus, or, if he personally is not the unique “X,” then the new age which his preaching and presence announces is.

The demythers’ concern is to get at what really happened and

what the evangelists really wanted to convey to their readers. And that's THE issue that must be at the center in theological deliberation. But as I see it, the demythers frame their deliberations in the model of a *theologia gloriae*, and thus seriously (if not totally) reduce their chances for getting at what really happened – especially if what REALLY happened was *theologia crucis*. To put it crassly, if God himself was operating in terms of *theologia crucis*, then not only the answer, but the initial framing of the question will be something else.

The Lutheran tradition has sought to do its theologizing with the model of *theologia crucis*. In the rubrics of such a theology the central question is not how to get an other-worldly god perceptibly available down here on the ground of men. Rather this theology says: Given the premise that the creator is always operating in, with, and under the elements of creation, what is he doing? The first answer to that follows the paradigm of Genesis 3. What is God doing? He is stalking his creation as its authorized and authoritative critic. He is indeed operational and active down here on the ground – too active! Man needs help vis-a-vis God's already operational *opus*. Needed is not a god who will break into the law of natural causality, or the law of finitude, or even the law of my chronic addiction to “das Vorfindliche” (if that were all that there was to that). No, needed rather is rescue, *soteria* [salvation, rescue] “from the law of sin and death” inflicted by that very critic.

In terms of the “normal” divine data available to Adam and Eve, the prospects of anything like that last sentence are highly unlikely, really incredible. Something like that would truly be a miracle, but not the miracle that the demythers wrestle with as they seek to get at what really happened in the event and the witness to the event from virgin birth to resurrection. (Thielicke notes that Bultmann, the lead proponent of demything

the NT, bridles at the mention of the resurrection of Jesus, while he takes God's forgiveness of sinners as an "of course". Luther saw the latter to be at least as incredible as the former, if not more so.) Consequently as *\_theologia crucis\_* goes about its work, this becomes its central question: Why, for what reasons, on what grounds, would God break away from his critic's role as he stalks creation, and switch to a different *\_opus\_* – forgiving rather than criticizing sinners – as he deals with them right down here on the ground?

The following citation from a statement under discussion in the systematics department says it well:

*"Systematic theology consciously and explicitly insists on asking 'Why.' It asks for The Sufficient Reason, The Adequate Basis, The \_Fons\_ Latin: source], never resting until it has found 'Reason Enough.' Why, for what reason finally, is this or that Christian claim made? By saying that the systematician ASKS for the 'why,' we're not suggesting that he does not know what it is. On the contrary, because he does know, at least in principle, what that sufficient reason is, his asking is meant chiefly to ask it into clarity, into the full prominence it deserves. He cannot even settle for the explanation, 'Why, because Scripture says so.' He still persists and asks again, 'And why, in turn, does Scripture say so?' His job is done only when he has traced the reason back to The Source: namely, God's reconciling the world unto himself in Christ Jesus – in other words, the gospel. The systematician's task is to 'necessitate' Christ."*

With the foregoing statement in mind as well as the general remarks about *\_theologia crucis\_*, let us inquire into the problem presented by the virgin birth of Jesus. First of all the necessity question. What necessity do the scriptures themselves

find in Jesus' virgin birth? Do they anywhere designate his virgin birth as necessary for anything? For his sinlessness? Although Augustine took this position, it is hard to show that any N.T. writer ever did. Perhaps the N.T. authors too, like Luther later (guess who learned it from whom?), were cautioned by a caveat similar to the one Luther raised as he took Jerome and the papists to task for seeking to maintain the sinlessness of Christ. This concern to divest Christ of sin, he said, "is to abolish Christ and make him useless" (LW 26, 279).

Necessary (i.e., needed) for humankind's salvation is not some break in the law of physical causality and natural finitude. Needed is some breakthrough of the law of sin and death. A naked miracle that breaks through causality and finitude does not yet break through the curse imposed by the critical creator. Is the virgin birth deemed necessary by any Biblical author for this? Not very obviously, as far as I can see. Even the Biblical presentation of the origin of human bi-sexual reproduction tends in the opposite direction. There is no intrinsic "curse" to bi-sexual reproduction. Gen. 1 and 2 suggest that this biological law is one of the operational schemata of non-fallen existence. The curse comes in Gen. 3 as God inflicts his criticism, and begins to execute it. Gen. 4 and 5, whatever else they may be witnessing to us, are graphic portrayals of the operation of the law of sin and death – in Abel's murder and in the monotonous conclusion to each segment of the "book of the generations of Adam", viz., "and he died. . . and he died . . . and he died." There are no substantive Biblical grounds for seeing a parthenogenetic birth as a conquest of this curse. Maybe male theologians are actually helpless to see that if anything, it would be PAINLESS delivery of the child to signal that the curse was undone.

What then is the focus of N.T. witness for salvation from the curse of the law of sin and death? Even though the witness is

variegated, the witnesses are unisonal in that the issue of soteriological necessity comes into focus at the conclusion, not the inception of Jesus' career. But of course right from the outset Jesus participates fully with men under this curse. So what is necessary for getting us OUT from under the curse is for him to get IN under it, and take it away. Is it not the unanimous N.T. witness that this is the "necessity-issue" of Good Friday? And then one step more. If the curse, the law of sin and death, is not just to be taken off the sinners' backs, but smashed in its very operation, then needed is the resurrection into non-nomological existence of the very one who endured the curse of the law of sin and death. What is necessary in the life and work of Jesus for our salvation? What's the sine qua non without which the N.T. witnesses themselves would not have had sufficient grounds (by their own standards of analysis) to proclaim the GOOD element of the NEWS? It's Jesus' Good Friday and Easter.

Whatever else Paul is doing in I Cor. 15, he is surely doing this very kind of wrestling with the question of necessity. Here it is explicitly the necessity of particular Good-News history to undo the "Unheilsgeschichte" [UN-salvation-history] that is the natural history of man. What is there in the history of Jesus that has to be there, has to have happened, if we are not just to know more about the ways of God with man, but actually have for ourselves a history that rescues us from that history we have "in Adam"? What's necessary for that? A resurrected Christ, and specifically a resurrected "Christ (who) died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures." "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins." His resurrection is as necessary as that. No segment of his life previous to Easter Sunday shows him immune to the law of sin and death. Easter does. He is not just immune to it, he has conquered it.



I myself have a hunch that it is this very insight operative in the theologies of many (all?) of the N..T. writers which leads them to give low-key treatment to the virgin birth of our Lord, if they were even aware of it. This is true even of Matthew and Luke, despite the coverage they give it in their opening chapters. For them it was what they had received, and in their own unique witnessing they included it. But they themselves do not portray it with Easter's kind of necessity. The virgin birth of Jesus does not usher in non-nomological human history, least of all for him! But for the Evangelists the resurrection of the crucified one does indeed do that, for him – and for his.

And that is what is at the heart of eschatological existence, of life in God's New Age. It is not existence derived from some transcendent divine space, or some transcendent divine time. It is rather an embodied life that transcends the law of sin and death, an existence that is curse-proof, an existence that takes its origin exclusively from the generative juices of God's non-nomological mercy – which happened in, with, under this Jesus' history. But perhaps right at that point we have the closest affinity of Jesus' virgin birth to the benefits of his cross and resurrection. It is in this light that I understand Werner Elert's two "summary sentences" on the virgin birth in his treatment of "The Incarnation."

*"A) The virgin birth cannot be understood merely as a demonstration of God's omnipotence, for in the name of God's omnipotence it can just as well be said that it was not necessary; nor can it be the substantive grounds for Jesus' sinlessness (Augustine), since the scriptural testimony offers no foundations for such a notion."B) Its connection with the incarnation rather can only be found in the fact that the virgin "knew not a man" (Lk 1:34), that the conception of her child did not come from "the will of man" (cf. Jn 1:13), that consequently the God-man born of her has his origin EXCLUSIVELY*

*in God (Lk 1:48ff; Gal 4:4)."*

Finally, is this anything close to demything? Or is all god-talk necessarily mythological? Only so, it seems, if God is relegated in our mind right from the beginning to some a-cosmic, a-temporal, extra-terrestrial locus. But if God is right from the beginning of our thinking understood to be intra-cosmic and intra-aeonic, then as *\_theologia crucis\_* goes about its theologizing, there is no task of bringing God down from wherever and making him relevant and comprehensible to the world we live in. Rather *\_theologia crucis\_* sees natural man living every moment in a "much too intimate" relation with God already, namely, with God the critic, a mortally intimate relationship. It sees the need for de-thanatizing, de-nomologizing, de-kriminizing human life, in fact, removing death, law, and judgment from the whole creation.

That anything like that should even have happened is in principle (i.e., in nomological principle) incredible, but *\_theologia crucis\_* sees that that is what REALLY happened on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. And if that is what really happened, then that dare not be demythed – on the very grounds of the demythers' own canons of operation, namely, to determine what really happened. For what the evangelists affirm about these two days is not mythological; it is what REALLY happened.

Here "God really was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not counting their trespasses against them."

Concordia Seminary

April 7, 1969

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# On Teaching Theology – A Slice of Life.

Colleagues,

A few days ago two dear friends, Fred Danker and Bob Schultz, in reducing the stuff in their filing cabinets have found copies of two things I wrote in ancient days, items I had completely forgotten. So they sent them to me. Bob even suggested that the item he found should have a wider audience. Even though I'm a bit antsy about passing it on to you, I'll do it. Antsy for a number of reasons. One being that it's a conflict report giving you only my view of what happened and not that of "the other side."

Antsy also in that it reveals the unhappiness (aka failure) in my first venture after official retirement, namely, a January-to-December-1994 guest-lectureship at Luther Seminary in Adelaide, Australia. And what was that? Toward the end of the first semester some of my students petitioned the administration to send me back home—and I didn't have a clue that this was happening. Not smart. When I finally caught on, I sent the memo below to all my students.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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**The Queen's Birthday (6/13) 1994**

**An Open Letter to my 4th, 5th, and 6th year  
Students at Luther Seminary, Adelaide**

## From Ed Schroeder

My interpretation of what happened this past semester.

1. I began the semester presupposing that by this time in your seminary careers you too saw the Lutheran Reformation's biblical hermeneutic (Law and Gospel [hereafter: L/G]), as well as its central axiom (justification by faith [hereafter: JBF]), to be as radical today as they were in the 16th century—and that we could build on that in our class.
2. I learned that in “your own theology” (I’ll use this expression, although I know it is an imprecise generalization) these two scarcely functioned as such. For your own theology these two were indeed distinctive Lutheran accents, but just two of the longer list of Lutheranism's distinctive doctrinal teachings. They had no over-arching significance for all the rest.
3. As one of you reminded me over and over again: “yes, these are fundamental Lutheran accents but they must be kept in balance with all the other elements in Lutheran theology.” Not until late in the semester did I come to understand that this constant call for balance was antithetical to the Reformers' central axiom. Question: What is there to “balance” with JBF or L/G? One might say that the 16th century opposition to the Augsburg Confession—from both the RC side and the Schwaermer/Left-Wing side—was no more than a call for the Reformers to keep their radical proposal “in balance” with items that these critics held dear. The Reformers' answer to that was no.
4. Related to that was a picture of Lutheran theological education, a way to teach theology, that I learned I could no longer do, although upon reflection I remembered that it was the kind of seminary education I had when I was a seminarian in the 1950s.

5. Here's the picture I now have of what you were expecting, of your image for a seminary class in systematic theology. Seminary education in ethics and doctrine is like shopping at Foodland [=the supermarket near the sem] for groceries. You push your cart down the various aisles with one of the store clerks at your side. As you go down the aisles marked "Sanctification" and "Ethical Issues" you examine as many of the different brands on the shelves as you can, given the time constraints of the semester. The clerk explains to you what's in each of the brands you pick up to look at, its plusses and minuses, and then recommends one (with a brand-name label "Lutheran") as the best buy and tells you why. Here and there down these aisles is a section of merchandise labeled "Lutheran." When you come to that section you follow the same procedure, noting the merchandise under the various Lutheran labels, some of them church denominations—your own Lutheran Church of Australia [LCA] or those in the USA [LCMS, ELCA]—some of them individual theologians: Hebart, Sasse, Hamann, Walther, Elert, Thielicke, Braaten, Bertram. Once more while in this Lutheran aisle, as time allows, the professor-clerk picks up item after item and gives you his critical evaluation. It gets a bit dicey, however, when we approach your own LCA section in the Lutheran aisle. You've become accustomed to taking all (mostly all?) of your previous purchases in the Lutheran aisle from the LCA shelves. And when the clerk mentions that, for this or that item, there might be a better product on some other Lutheran shelf, you are not cheered by the proposal. Some of you begin to wonder why this clerk is even on the LCA payroll to conduct tours in this supermarket.
6. I know that supermarket pattern of education. I am the product of it. But I don't do seminary education that way. One of the most important reasons for moving to a

different model, I have found, is that the supermarket model of theological education is almost useless for the practice of pastoral ministry. For pastoral work you don't get much help simply from learning the skills of theological shopping and making the right selections from the shelves in the theological marketplace. For pastoral work you need skills in how to cook meals in the kitchen—even after you have filled your grocery basket with items (mostly?) from the Lutheran shelves. Just having your pantry full of Lutheran labels will guarantee nothing about what you put on the table to nourish Christ's people. And it may even deceive you into thinking: "all I have to do is take the box from the shelf and put it in front of the hungry members to eat. Of course, I tell them how nutritious it is and why it's the best buy. Thus I do for my parishioners what the store clerk did for me when I was at the sem."

7. Not so. Pastoral ministry is cooking in the kitchen and serving the food to Christ's siblings. Therefore seminary education is practice-time and scrimmage-time to learn how to do this. The role of the seminary professor is to show you how to mix/bake/cook the ingredients and how to serve them.
8. In this picture seminary classes in dogmatics and ethics are "practical theology." The teacher's task is helping students learn the skill of practicing Christian doctrine and Christian ethics in what you are "cooking" in the kitchen, and then learning the skill of how to serve it so that it nourishes (and doesn't poison) the eaters.
9. In our class on Sanctification this gave the syllabus the shape of Gospel-grounding & Gospel-praxis for each component piece of the dogma of the Third Article of the Christian Creed. In the Ethical Issues class that meant: rightly distinguishing the law and the gospel as we

applied the Word of God to ethical issues. The first 8 weeks were the Grounding: in-the-kitchen-practice using L/G and JBF with “evangelical” theologian John Stott’s book on Christian Ethics as our ongoing alternate option, whom we consulted recipe-by-recipe as we went through the standard ethics “cookbook.” The last 8 weeks were Praxis for “serving” such a L/G ethic in the 18 different issues that the class members selected for their own major papers.

10. For both of the courses as we went along I assigned biweekly 2-page mini-papers, so that I could see what & how you were cooking as we went along in the semester. Seldom did I ever put a letter grade on any of these. Instead I offered “kitchen-counsel” so that the next time you baked something it would turn out better.
11. My own job-description is that, although I could be the store clerk (for I do know what’s on the shelves), I’m doing something else in the seminary classroom. I’m a chef called to teach you how to cook and bake, to show you how to function in the kitchen so that you can become a master chef yourself. When one of your 2-page concoctions turned out awful, I usually told you so, and then also recommended ways to improve it. Whenever you did come up with a super-prize-winning-Pavlova [=Aussie super-dessert]—and many in the Sanctification class did as time went on—I signaled that with my words of hoopla.
12. The Ethical Issues class had very few such high moments. Doubtless if I had described to you what I’ve written above about store-clerk and kitchen-chef some of you would have come on board. But it took me quite a while to realize that with this Ethical Issues class I was in the Foodland store here at Luther Seminary and what I was trying to do was run a class in a kitchen. No wonder there was chaos. No wonder you gritched when I “changed the

assignments.” What I thought I was saying was: “Instead of trying again to bake this 2-pager (which seemed generally to have flopped), see how you can cook up another 2-page recipe that I just thought of last night.” While I was looking for more samples from you to help you improve your kitchen-craft; you were hearing “now we’ve gotta push our cart around the store a few more times.”

13. Since I’m committed to the model of the chef’s-class-in-the-kitchen, I purposely didn’t pay much attention to the inventory on the store shelves in the ethics aisle, only referring to them in passing. Thus it is no priority with me to cover the waterfront in these areas—either throughout past history or on the contemporary scene. Nor was it a high priority to highlight LCA doctrinal or ethical statements, or even those from my own church in the USA. The LCA ones most of you already knew from your life and study up until now. My own ELCA documents are different, but not of any greater worth for pastoral work, I think. It is my conviction from my own experience that “statements” made by church bodies (even “good” statements) are of almost no significance for the nitty-gritty of pastoral ministry.
14. Instead I was constantly pushing you to work in the kitchen with the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions as our primary theological resources, “doing” Bible according to the L/G hermeneutic and “being” confessional according to the yardstick of JBF. Wasn’t this the place where our clashes came, namely, hermeneutics and justification-by-faith? We were all in favor of L/G and JBF. But the way I used them was (at best) different from what you expected, or (at worst) wrong in your judgment. I did not go for “balance” in using the L/G hermeneutic for getting at the Biblical message, nor in applying the JBF yardstick for everything in doctrine and ethics.



15. In the Sanctification class a few students eventually became happy campers as we came to semester's end. In the Ethical Issues class I know of only two.
16. About one-third of the way through the Ethical Issues class I finally detected that you were stonewalling me as your primary response to my teaching. Interpreting your silence at first as confusion, I sought to "make perfectly clear" what I was trying to do. Hence my oft-repeated axiom: Lutheran theological ethics is not concerned to help people do the right thing, but to distinguish law and gospel rightly when applying the Word of God to ethical matters. But in vain. Only when it hit the fan did I finally catch on that silence was a passive-aggressive response, that anger, not "what's he talking about?" was your message to me.
17. All of the above throws some helpful light on component pieces of the clash in the Ethical Issues class. Item: Our peace-making sessions on Scripture. After the free-wheeling and wide-ranging discussion of my article on Lutheran hermeneutics and Bertram's "Hermeneutics of Apology 4," came still the question: "Yes, but how much of the Bible do you believe is actually inspired?" To my ears that question said: "Questioner has not understood one thing I have been trying to say." Questioner was thinking: "Ed is saying all these nice things about Lutheran hermeneutics in order to skirt the fundamental question. So I'll ask him point-blank: How much?" My own on-the-spot conclusion was: "Questioner doesn't trust me. No matter what I say, he won't be satisfied." Item: the double session on third use of the Law. The debate was not between "us" who hold to the third use and Ed who doesn't. Instead it was two different readings of Formula of Concord article 6 that were in conflict. My drumbeat throughout was to make distinction between L & G (as the

preceding FC 5 does) and comprehend the role of God's law in the life of the regenerate from that starting point. From this I read FC 6 to say: the law still speaks to the Old Adam in every Christian, but not to the new-born self. For the new-born self FC 6 says the Holy Spirit's leading and Christ as Lord are the ethical resources. My proposed label for that was "second use of the Gospel."

The other view held that the law has no accusatory force for re-born Christians and that they can thus use it without danger for ethical guidance. Even though St. Paul warns the Galatians about "returning to the law" after they've come to faith in Christ, he's not talking about this kind of third use.

Isn't this just another variation on the debate about L/G hermeneutics, and about how to apply the yardstick of JBF to ethics? I think so.

Item: my continuing comment that John Stott's use of the Bible was biblicism. I didn't understand why so many of you thought that such a label was "name-calling" and you wanted to be more gentle toward Stott. I use the term as an objective tag for one particular way to use the Bible for doctrine and ethics. I anticipated that L/G Lutheran seminarians wouldn't argue with that, especially after I showed you this constant hermeneutic at work in Stott's book.

Not until XX [=very bright student, who, as I later learned, led the procession to the principal's office for my dismissal] once remarked that "we've been taught that Stott is quite close to our Lutheran position," did it dawn on me that in criticizing Stott I was criticizing what you considered to be your own hermeneutics, and that you thought it was genuinely Lutheran. Biblicism may well

be mixed in with the hermeneutics of many denominations, but it is a clear alternative to the L/G hermeneutic from the Lutheran Reformation.

If the term Biblicism had been in vogue in Luther's day, he would surely have used it to identify the RC's and the Schwaermer's use of the Scriptures—even though these two seem to be, as he said, “foxes running in opposite directions.” The trouble was, Luther noted, that though running in opposite directions, their tails were tied together. Though they quoted the Bible furiously, they both used it wrong in the same way – making no distinction between Biblical law and Biblical gospel.

Item: the flap about homosexuality. I anticipated that you did not need me to teach you about the LCA statement you yourselves knew. Our very first discussions verified that to be true. In addition, the reading assignment in Stott offered an extended argument of support for the LCA statement. What I was seeking to do was to have you read (and in one case listen to) other Christian voices on the subject. It all blew up before we even got to first base.

Here's what I remember about what happened. I prepared a computer-draft of the main points in the readings we did. With the very first one of them it hit the fan. I began with the quote by Aussie author Robert Hughes that homophobia is high in Aussie society. There was universal disagreement with Hughes, some of it expressed with considerable passion. Somewhere in the mix I said something to the effect that “methinks milady doth protest too much.” And wasn't your vociferous disagreement with Hughes an indicator that he might just be right? If Aussies can detect BS a mile away—as I've been told—I can detect homophobes at admittedly shorter distances, because

I am one – although I didn't know that until some of my own seminary students in the US told me they were gay. I then discovered how I shrink and shudder and wish they would go away. I should have closed shop on the whole topic on that very first day for the good of all concerned. But still working with my chef-in-the-kitchen model, I pressed on to see if we could cook up a Lutheran ethic on the matter by hearing out the other voices in the readings. That was a tactical mistake.

Although I understand that the word went around that "Schroeder says homosexuality is OK," my own perception is that I never got a chance to present "my" proposed Lutheran ethic on the subject. As far as I think I got was to show you evidence why the folks we were reading could come to the conclusions they did. My own proposal for a Lutheran ethic on the question is the lengthy SAIN SEX article from my stateside colleague Bob Bertram, distributed during our reconciliation sessions and never discussed.

Item: My alleged "cutting off" class discussion and seeming disinterest in student opinion. If we were doing the grocery-store model of education, there would be considerable room for student opinion on the worth and value of the products being examined. If the model is learning to cook in the kitchen (or learning how to play golf from Arnold Palmer) then the value of student opinion is less significant, sometimes flat-out disruptive, of ever learning how to prepare today's recipe. I am a crusty old curmudgeon and doubtless could be kinder in many a case. That this sometimes is flippant, coarse, and harsh to some folks' sensibilities is something I regret. Mea culpa. But it's not really done in meanness. I'm genuinely committed to teach all of you to do well in the kitchen,

whether you've got a high IQ or a more modest one. So even when I do it wrong in cutting off discussion, the conscious purpose is to get on with the cooking-class, to show you how to concoct today's recipe.

Once more, no wonder there were clashes. You thought you were in Foodland, I thought we were in front of the oven.

My last item: your class behavior. I've referred earlier to the stonewalling in the Ethical Issues class and your passive-aggressive responses that I caught on to late in the term. But there is one more item. If we had ever gotten around to the full list of items listed for our "let's talk" sessions, I would have liked to pursue with you your own behavior and ethics in the course of the semester. Even granting that we were frazzled by virtue of trying to do two different things at the same time, I see something important in the mix beyond that.

That is the critical response from your side of the desk that finally brought letters of complaint to the Seminary Council before anyone had ever spoken to me face-to-face. From the way I understand Luther's explanations in his catechisms, that looks like violation of the 4th and 8th commandments. And among Christians it sounds to me like violation of Jesus' own specifications for addressing conflicts within the Christian community (Matthew 18). In discussing this with a couple of you, I was told that such is not the case, or at least, it is not clearly the case. At present I am not convinced that what happened among us is not covered by those rubrics.

18. What about next semester? Many of you are slotted to be in my classes. From the Principal I've learned that each of you has an approved alternate choice if you wish to take

it. At present I cannot brainstorm a teaching model that merges the supermarket with the kitchen. The supermarket model by itself is just not my cup of tea. For the entire 37 years of my theology-teaching I've been doing "cuisine-art." Perhaps there is something even better than that. Maybe I'll discover it during my continuing education stint with the Aboriginal Lutheran pastors and evangelists in Western Australia during the upcoming inter-semester break. Stay tuned. Call in if you have some counsel.

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## Not Missing the Message in the Good Samaritan Parable

Colleagues,

[Preliminary note. Unrelated to this topic—well maybe not—is this item about Fred Danker of BDAG fame, known to many of you. Next Monday, July 12, 2010, is Fred's 90th birthday. Send him a greeting. Snailmail: 3438 Russell Blvd. #203, St. Louis MO 63104.]

This coming Sunday's Gospel reading is often (mis)understood by readers—and then on Sundays (mis)proclaimed by preachers. The "(mis)" inserts in that sentence are also my own confession from days gone by when I was the preacher and that was text. More than once I've missed the message. Chris Repp informs me that he's found one of Luther's sermons on this text wherein the reformer comments on missing the message, and then proclaims to his congregation (in 15 printed pages!) what the genuine message is. To read it for yourself GO

to <http://www.orlutheran.com/html/mlselk10.html>

Here's my short version (a mere 2 pages) of what Luther was talking about.

We miss the message in this text when we presume that Jesus, contrary to his usual habits, did indeed answer the lawyer's question, and tell him who his neighbor was. And that answer then would be: Neighbor is anyone in need who happens to show up on your path. To be sure, Jesus takes the "scenic route" of a parable to answer that question. Yet his parable intends to answer the lawyer's "who is my neighbor" question. Luther said: Not so.

That would indeed be strange coming from Jesus. For when did Jesus ever give a straight answer to the questions his challengers put to him? Instead of getting entangled in THEIR agenda, he always entangled them in HIS agenda. So we should not be expecting Jesus to give a straight answer to the "neighbor-question" from this challenger either.

Instead, with this parable Jesus is addressing HIS agenda, implicit, but mis-focused, in the lawyer's first question: "How do I get the life that lasts?" In doing so he entangles the lawyer with another question: "What does the Torah say?" Here the lawyer has competence. Well maybe not, since he answers with the Torah's Mosaic law and not with the Torah's Abrahamic promise. Not smart. And that leads to the jugular. With Moses in focus he seeks to justify himself. Imagine that! Standing before THE justifier sent by God—aka THE Good Samaritan—he's going to go it alone. What chutzpah! But now Jesus has enwebbed him and with the questioner in the palm of his hand, Jesus proceeds parabolically, taking him down a different path than he wanted to go. It finally concludes with "Gotcha!"

By this time in Luke's Gospel we ourselves should have caught on

that the “life that lasts” is connection with Jesus and not greater clarity about “what is written in the law.” That’s what Jesus is addressing, not only here but throughout Luke’s entire Gospel. And learning just who the neighbor is in order to fulfill God’s commandments is, as folks say today, “not helpful” for getting to the life that lasts. Au contraire. You wind up in a ditch.

The main characters in the parable are the lawyer and Jesus. The “gotcha!” at the end is that the lawyer is the victim, already half-dead in the ditch, and standing before him at this very moment is THE Good Samaritan. Better said, HIS Good Samaritan. Now the question is addressed to him: “What is your heart hanging onto for ‘dear life’?” Will you switch, or stay in the ditch?”

In the Crossings paradigm it might go something like this:

#### *BAD NEWS—Nomikos*

- 1. Luke designates him right at the git-go with the Greek term “nomikos” (from “nomos,” law). That means more than simply lawyer, an expert in God’s law. And nomikos signals that right off the bat. He’s seeking to obtain the life that lasts (=God’s own) by doing something, finally, as Luke tells us, to “justify himself.” Nomikos is a legalist. “Do” in order to “get” so that you wind up justified. Which is indeed the way life proceeds in the old creation. Not bad per se. But bad news – dumb, dumb, dumb – when you’re seeking the life that lasts, the new creation.*
- 2. “Testing” instead of trusting Jesus [who, at the outset in this narrative, IS the “hidden” de facto Good Samaritan] in the process and trusting that law instead. The Jesus standing before him, talking with him, is not*



only the nomikos' Good Samaritan, but both the God and the Neighbor his law tells him to love. But the nomikos does NOT love this Jesus, "tests" him instead, thus blowing both of the 2 big commandments in one fell swoop. So by his own law-commitment, he's blown it. (But that's the stuff for the next step.)

3. The nomikos is himself already half-dead in the ditch, deserted by the law as agency for life that lasts, which the parable will reveal as it unfolds. The parable is about his own life, not about someone else, some fictitious other person. The law's agents—priest/levite—are unable (unwilling?) to help him. They may not be passing him by because they are heartless. They are unable to help. He is helpless with his nomikos life, and the nomos cannot help him at all. The law is incapable of "neighboring" (v.36) him. Even worse, the law itself turns out to be the robber who by the trickery of teasing him to seek life by its agency, finally turns upon him and rends him, robbing him of the life he has and offering nothing for his healing. Half-dead now, he'll be a complete goner by sunrise.

#### GOOD NEWS The Good Samaritan the Nomikos Needs

4. The Jesus talking to him IS the Good Samaritan par excellence, meeting him in his already half-dead-in-the-ditch nomikos existence. All the Good Sam predicates in the text are Jesus-predicates: Moved with pity. Chesedh stuff, not nomos stuff. When Good Sam is seen as Jesus himself, all of v. 34 sparkles anew: "pouring out of wine and oil, etc." are the metaphors for what Jesus is up to in Luke. [Remember he's "going up to Jerusalem" already.] V. 35 also sparkles anew when you predicate it to Jesus (you can fill in the blanks).
5. The parable's concluding "go and do likewise" needs to be

*understood in terms of the switcheroo that Jesus does with the “neighbor” word. Not “who is the neighbor to be loved” in this parable, but who “neighbored” whom? Who was/is THE already-operating “Neighbor-lover” in the story? Good Sam turns out to be the loving neighbor, who rescues the half-dead. He is the neighbor that the nomikos needs to “love,” first of all by receiving his medications. “Go and do likewise” = let this GS do his mercy/wine/oil/donkey/inn and then “promise for continuing care” for you. In other words: trust this GS standing right in front of you. That’s “Go and do likewise,” part One. But there’s a “Go and do likewise,” part two.*

- 6. Part two of “Go and do Likewise” is: Be a “little” Good Samaritan for all the folks you find half-dead in their own nomikos-ditches, and pour on them not your own wine/oil, but the wine/oil of the ONE whose Good-Friday pharmacy and post-Easter “long-term clinical after-care” bestows the life that lasts. Don’t fail to notice his promise to keep on “paying” to preserve it.*

The entire parable is about the topic in the nomikos’ mis-focused original question: “doing in order to get the life that lasts.” That’s soteriology. The parable is not about ethics, about being a do-gooder. It’s about salvation, the same agenda we had in the July 4 gospel last Sunday.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder.

P.S. In the church’s ancient lectionary the pericope started two verses earlier (as Lk 10:23-37). It was the Gospel appointed for Trinity 13. It came around every year in the summertime. Those two verses may have been excised by modern lectionary scholars, hinting perhaps that they want to make a moral tale out of

Luke's intended soteriological text. If so, I think that's a mistake.

There are a total of four "Jesus verses"—vv 21-24—between the Mission of the 70 text (last Sunday's Gospel) and the G.S. pericope. These four verses are the soteriological glue holding the two pericopes together. Not in vain does Luke tell us "Just then"—i.e., right after these four "Jesus" verses— the nomikos shows up to "test" Jesus. It is NOT really about getting clearer specs on the love-neighbor commandment. It's about this poor nomikos now standing before THE Good Samaritan. It's about getting connected to this G.S. when you are lethally disconnected by virtue of being hooked, as the nomikos self-confessedly is, on a dead-end alternative for getting the life that lasts.

The Mary/Martha pericope immediately following the G.S. text confirms what Luke intends to be the golden thread through this whole chapter: "If you haven't caught on yet what's going on in this chapter 10," Luke is telling his readers, "it's all about 'listening to what HE was saying,' i.e., stuff 'which will not be taken away' from anyone so listening, 'the one (and only) thing needed' to get you out of YOUR ditch when your personal brand of nomological robbers leave you there half-dead."

So it seems to me.

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## Werner Ewert's chapter on

# Economics in his book The Christian Ethos. (Part 2)

Colleagues,

For introductory information on this two-part posting, see last week's Part 1, now on the Crossings website: <https://crossings.org/thursday/2010/thur062410.shtml> Here is Part 2. Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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## Werner Elert: The Christian Ethos Chapter 3. THE NATURAL ORDERS Unit 19 Economic Interdependence

*[The text of subsections 1 and 2 of Unit 19 were last week's Thursday Theology posting.]*

### 3. The Godliness of the Economic Order and its Vulnerability

Economic interdependence is therefore not only a "Seinsgefuege" (web of daily-life existence) for individual persons, also not simply a collaboration of human activity. It includes within it a three-fold "Sachgefuege"—a web of things ("stuff" needed for daily life), of work, and of wherewithal (wages, property and possessions), all linked to each other. It is a "natural order," a "good order of God," in the words of the Augsburg Confession (Art. 16) wherein "buying and selling, possessing property" are "bonae ordinationes dei," good things ordained by God. And in the Apology to the AC comes the sentence "Therefore there will be different rewards for different labors." (Art. 4:194) This order, like all

the others, does not make us good or bad, but it gives us, as do all the other orders, the possibility to demonstrate, to verify, whether we are good or bad. Like all the other orders, God's economic order too is exposed to the danger of distortion, destruction and demonization.

The demonization of a life lived without working is luxury, which spends itself in self-enjoyment. The demonization of work without having something to show for it is slavery, which makes human beings into replaceable objects. Slavery makes interdependence a one-way street and thereby undermines the very foundations of the economic order. It is not the slave, but the slavemaster who is accountable before God for this destruction.

A third form of demonization that arises from denial of economic interdependence is the wealth accumulation of "Grosskapital" [often translated "big business," today possibly simply rendered as "Wall Street"], capitalism run amok, which divides all human relations into luxury on the one side and slavery on the other. ["Big" capitalists do not have to depend on anyone for their economic survival—or so they think.]

These three forms of demonization expose a "law unto itself" at work within the economic order. It reveals that God's good "natural law" operative in the economic order encounters a contrary "law of evil" (section 11:3 above) at work there, just as "the law of evil" is also present in all other manifestations of God's natural law. For this reason the economic order too, like the orders of family, marriage, and nationhood, calls on the authority of the state to exercise its "usus politicus legis" to preserve and protect it in the face of evil now at work in the

fallen world.

4. **Economic Order in the New Testament – “Apostolic Economics”** The linkage between these three–life’s needs, human work and wages/wherewithal–is a “natural order,” a given for human existence. Consequently the Christian church cannot change it without destroying it. Yes, in small groups it does happen and has happened that specific forms of such changes have occurred, but the economic “law” in such cases has possibly been momentarily suspended, though strictly speaking, not that at all. When the Christians in Jerusalem tried a possessions-collective form of economics (Acts 4:32ff), they soon had to abandon it, for a few years later we find the mother of John Mark once more owning her own home. (Acts 12:12) Quite possibly the Jerusalem congregation attempted this because they expected the immediate return of Christ, and quite possibly they abandoned it when that immediate return didn’t happen. Possibly also they abandoned it because one could not determine the interior intentions of people coming to join the common-property collective. (Acts 5:1ff) For the long term it couldn’t last because it was unproductive, for the third factor in the economic Seinsgefuege, daily work, was not–according to the information we have–a part of the equation. That may also be linked to Paul’s later efforts to gather funds to support the Jerusalem congregation.

The monastic movement once more repeated the experiment in its own way, and filled in that gap by making work a part of the program (Rule of St. Benedict, chapter 48. “Ora et labora” – pray and work). They acknowledged the economic order about possessions in that, although the individual monk had none, the community did indeed. But as an overall option the world cannot be changed into a monastery, today

even less than at that time.

Living without possessions as did St. Francis and his friars minor is indeed humanly moving; and when, like Berthold von Regensburg, they never ceased to condemn greed, they also impacted the world in resisting the demonization of possessions. But the fatal “other side” was mendicancy, begging from others so that you could live, which also upset the balance in economic interdependence. We prefer to follow Paul’s citation of a word of Christ, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35), and we can thank the Reformation for exposing the false appearance of superior piety that comes with begging. (Aug. Conf. 27.53)

When we ask the apostles themselves, they answer here in matters of economics just as they do in matters of civil law, neither as utopian revolutionaries, nor as dreamers disinterested in worldly affairs. There is in fact an explicit “apostolic economic order.” When Paul speaks of physical needs for living, he does not first think about someone caring for someone else. Instead he firmly admonishes people to work. Caring for physical needs and daily work come under the law of recompense—getting what you deserve from what you’ve done. (2 Thess. 3:10) Whoever tries to abandon this law is acting “ataktos” (vv. 6 and 11). [Greek term usually translated “lazy,” but literally “a – taktos” = “against the order”].

The first sentence of this apostolic economic order goes something like this: Everyone works with the ability he has to care for his own needs. That is not a self-centered statement, for it is made with the neighbor in mind. From this assertion Paul can cite himself as an example, for he himself worked as a craftsman, in order “not to become a

burden to others.” (1 Cor. 9:6,15; 2 Cor. 11:9; 12:13; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8) A similar style of working so as not to burden others is what he expected from his congregations. (1 Thess. 4:11f.)

Presupposed, of course, is that work is recompensed with wages that cover one’s daily needs. Thereby we come to the second thesis: The laborer is worthy of his hire. (Lk. 10:7; Mt. 10:10; 1 Cor. 9:9; 2 Tim 2:6) Take note: not the work, but the worker is to be remunerated. That thesis makes the employer responsible for the person of the worker. He shall guarantee that the worker receives “what is just and fair.” (Col. 4:1) That such fairness frequently does not take place is not a complaint arising only in modern times. It is indeed a basic reason for the frequent condemnation of the rich that we find in the New Testament. (James 5:4)

Human slavery that we encounter in today’s economic scene as demonized work was, at the time of the apostles, a de facto legal institution of the state’s system of justice. On their own they could not undo it. But they did bring it under the rubric of the order of mutual interdependence. On the one hand that happened as they welcomed slaves as brothers into the Christian congregation and thereby granted them the quality of personhood, something that existing civil law did not. This resulted then in their enjoining slave-owners, as far as their authority extended, to be personally responsible for the personhood of their slaves. The classical example of this is the Epistle of Philemon. When read in its wider context it shows that slavery in the ancient world finally came to an end not for economic reasons, but for ethical ones. Thereby the church succeeded where the Stoics did not, even though the Stoics’ line of thinking about slavery was



close to that of the Christians.

Conversely, the apostles also called the worker to be responsible TO his employer and FOR him as well. They called not simply for obedience—for coerced obedience does not change slave mentality—but for faithfulness, and they said the same to the slave-owner.

Finally property too is brought in under the order of economic mutual interdependence. The Old Testament sees wealth for the most part from the viewpoint of the law of recompense. It is received either as a blessing or a reward from the Lord (Gen. 33:11; Ps. 112:3). The New Testament is without a doubt more cautious. Here wealth is seen first of all as danger and temptation. Danger in eclipsing God from view, temptation in doing the same with the neighbor. Worshipping possessions and serving God cannot be united (Mt. 6:24). The love of money, which sees life fulfilled in having everything, is for that very reason the root of all evil (1 Tim.6:10). It is of all the vices the one most denounced in the New Testament. But simply to have nothing is not the solution, for poverty itself does nothing to curb the desire for riches along with all its temptations (1 Tim. 6:9), and conversely possessing goods is only then contrary to loving God if it closes the heart to the brother in need (1 John 3:17). Temptation in this direction is great, but it must be resisted.

The third thesis in “apostolic” economic order is: Ownership obligates. If we do not hear much of that in the New Testament, that lies in the social composition of the first Christian congregations. Although the majority of the members were not well-to-do, those who were people of means were always committed—not to purge themselves of

their possession, but—to help the impoverished with the goods they had that exceeded their own personal needs. (Rom. 15:27: 2 Cor 9:8ff). Let everyone “labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy!” (Eph. 4:28)

It would be imprudent to understand the apostolic economic order as a kind of economic program or even only to draw from it a theoretical model for organizing work, possessions, and daily material needs. The genuine “apostolic” quality of this order is rather that it sticks to the elemental givens of daily life, that it lets what is natural be natural, that here (as it does in sexual matters) it simply seeks to resist everything that is “against nature.”

The linkage between work, wherewithal and human need is a natural order. But it is only then “in order” if neither the whole system is absolutized, nor one of the three components absolutized (as in those three forms of demonization mentioned above) to the detriment of the other two. This threefold network of interdependence in no way stands as an “iron-clad law of economics” alongside or above human common life and interaction. Rather it constitutes the “givens” underlying daily life. It can be used correctly, can be misused and can also be destroyed. It is used with justice when the mutual interdependence [Aufeinanderangewiesensein!] of everyone comes to fulfillment.

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# Werner Elert's chapter on Economics in his book The Christian Ethos. (Part 1)

Colleagues,

Shortly before Christmas 2008 I passed on to you some economic analysis from my teacher Werner Elert (ThTh#548). Though written in the 1930s, it sounded like he was talking about us today. If you want to review it, GO to <https://crossings.org/thursday/2008/thur121108.shtml>

In Elert's textbook on Christian ethics, THE CHRISTIAN ETHOS (original German edition 1949), he has a section on economics too. [Elert's book was translated into English many years ago, but not too well, and that (limping) translation was reprinted recently by Wipf & Stock.] Marie and I have tried our hand to retranslate that economics section. It's a tad long, so we'll post it in two pieces—first half today, second half next Thursday.

Does it offer any help in getting a handle on today's Wall Street? Or the crude oil bubbling into the Gulf of Mexico? For the latter Tom Friedman's op-ed in the NYT (June 11, 2010) comes close. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/13/opinion/13friedman.html>

He doesn't draw on Elert (no surprise) but on an ancient Pogoism: "We have met the enemy—and he is us." The "demonization of the economic order" that Elert discusses (in the second half coming next week) is what Friedman's talking about. It is, of course, not good news. [Nor, sadly, is Friedman's proposed solution for coping with the enemy, since Friedman thinks the enemy is "only" us.]

Nevertheless, because there IS Good News being “done on earth, as it is in heaven”—see Mark 1:15, for instance—there continue to be grounds for saying:

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **Werner Elert: The Christian Ethos**

### **Chapter 3. THE NATURAL ORDERS**

#### **Unit 19 Economic Interdependence**

[Elert’s long German word translated “interdependence” above is one even-longer German word: “Auf-ein-an-der-an-ge-wie-sen-sein.” [9 syllables, 25 letters! No hyphens in the German word, of course. We put them in just in case you want to try to pronounce it!] It signals not just interdependence, but “needing each other.” In the economic order we “need” connections, linkages, to other people. We will use the word “interdependence” for that big word. So remember the larger meaning when you see it.]

1. **Property and Ownership** By virtue of God’s creative and governing action there is a “Seinsgefüge” [Another of Elert’s technical terms. For our very “being” (= Sein), that is, in order for us to exist at all, God has placed us into his creation within a number of webs, networks, (= Gefüge) linking us to the rest of God’s creation], a de facto network, enmeshing us not only to other people, but also to places and things in creation. Economic interdependence is one of those networks, a “natural order,” a “given,” in which persons and things are linked to each other in a similar way, for example, as is a parent to a child or a citizen to the government. Even

without the Biblical word from the creator, Genesis 1:28f., which transfers to humankind the “dominium mundi” [“dominion over” things in the world] and directs humans to other creatures for their own sustenance, it is clear that to sustain our own physical life we need things and that this “dominion” over the things we need constitutes a fact of life ordained by God the world’s creator and governor. Ordained by God, this economic interdependence is an “order” in God’s creation.

This natural fact of life, so it seems, is presupposed in the seventh commandment of the decalogue, just as an already existing parent-child relationship is presupposed by the fourth commandment and marriage relationships already existing are presupposed by the sixth. “Dominium” is the term in Roman law for ownership, which gives unrestricted rights over a tangible object to the owner. “Thou shalt not steal” then means: You shall not destroy the “Seinsgefüge,” the already operative connections, that exist between another human being and the goods that are naturally linked to him. Would that then mean that the essence of the seventh commandment is “protection of private property”? Some people have said so in the past.

However, such canonization of private property has several flaws. First of all, the ownership of things, when it is conferred to us by God, is not at all without limits, neither conceptually nor as a matter of fact. For since we are responsible to God for everything in our lives, we are also responsible to God for the things we own, things we have received from God.

Secondly, this “dominium mundi” from the creator has been granted to the entire human community. In Genesis this is indeed initially only two persons. But when this community expands, that does not mean that they are to divide up

this communal “dominion” into individual segments of private ownership. The seventh commandment also applies to a collective or communal structure of ownership. In that case “Thou shalt not steal” would mean “You shall not appropriate for private use what belongs to all.” Some have understood this to mean that private ownership in any form is stealing from others. But the last two commandments speak against such an understanding of the seventh. For these final two commandments patently presuppose private property. In these two a technical term appears, which from a different direction finally makes the seventh fully clear: You shall not covet what belongs to your NEIGHBOR.

And that is the third point that challenges such a notion: property (ownership) is theoretically unrestricted ownership of an object, but never de facto. In order to be unlimited master over anything—even if it were just one thing—we would have to enjoy unlimited freedom. But we do not, by virtue not only of our relationship to God, but also our relationship to the neighbor. Regardless of what we may be, we are what we are only and always in relationships, always networked into God’s orders where others are also linked.

We can exercise our proprietary rights over things only within the existing orders [= the relationships, the spaces and places, where God has “ordained” that we live out our lives] of family, marriage, nationhood, and state. The civil laws of modern states for the most part protect all private property under the rubric of the Roman legal notion of property. But even with that, it is acknowledged that we can exercise our supposedly unlimited property rights only within existing structures, namely, within the order of the government we live under.

If we ask, then, about God's evaluation of all this, we can only find that within the other orders. A father, for example, although legally he has unlimited right over his own property, cannot forget that he has a son. A husband cannot forget that he has a wife, even if they do not live in communal property ownership. Should someone, for example, wish to exercise his property rights over a herd of cattle by simply destroying them without making them useful for anyone, in so doing he is also destroying the goods of an entire community, even when this community can raise no legally grounded objections.

Therefore when we understand our ownership rights over things as natural law (*jus naturale*) granted by God, precisely there we encounter its limitations. This *jus naturale* is valid even in situations where the legal order of a given state, for example, a communist one, would not acknowledge any individual rights of ownership at all. In that case, it is also limited by human law (*jure humano*). However, factually it is also limited in the legal order of a state where civil law grants unlimited rights. For even here it is subject to conditions of debts to be paid, family obligations, and inheritance laws. Most of all, in advanced legal systems that distinguish between consumer goods and production goods, consumer goods only serve individual need. Production goods by contrast go beyond that and are necessary for the livelihood of others. When the state authority applies this distinction, even when the state has not simply taken it over, but nevertheless guards it, we see that private property is always also a communal order where no property rights are granted that undermine the welfare of others or of the people as a whole.

**2. Work and Wages** The seventh commandment as well as the last

two of the ten do not protect private property. They protect the neighbor. The seventh restrains the wicked hand, the last two the wicked heart, from sinning against the conditions of their own physical existence. When these commandments turn our attention to the neighbor, they release us from thinking about ourselves. They release us also from things, or they at least teach us to view things, physical goods, always through the eyes of the neighbor. Wherever Christ's "new commandment" ("love one another," and not merely "love the neighbor") regulates all interhuman relationships, this kind of instruction is, of course, not necessary. (See section 10:2 above.) [Later in the book—"Ethos under grace"—comes a full-scale discussion of the "newness" of Christ's new commandment. Economic interdependence comes under the rubric "Ethos under law."] But that makes it all the more necessary for human life under the law, namely, God's law to preserve the creation and God's law of equitable recompense, rewards and punishments for human actions (section 8 above). Indeed, here we are once more reminded of a "natural order." But that order does not consist in everyone having things of their own, which is not always the case, nor that all things belong to everyone in common, which also is not the case. Rather it is that when we deal with the material things of the world we are linked to one another. No one can enjoy the most elemental of all consumer goods, a piece of bread, if we live together like crows who from mistrust seek to pluck out each others' eyes.

The owner of a mine, whether as private property or as a collective, would have nothing of his underground treasure if the mine worker didn't bring it to the surface. Nor would the worker have anything if the engineer hadn't built the machines. Nor would the engineer have anything



without the inventor who would not keep his secret to himself, because the mine owner with the help of patent law guaranteed him an extraordinary reward. This economic interdependence is therefore a “Seinsgefüge” where one member is linked to another. It is a fact of life that is preexistent to economic activity, just as the state is a “fact of life” preexisting all political activity. But it is at the same time an operational network that is “in order” only so long as no member falls out but every interlocking cog works together with all the others.

Such economic interdependence with all working together in meaningful activity we call work. When we understand work that way, it too comes under the rubric of the law of preservation and the law of equitable recompense where recompense enacts the law of reward and punishment (section 8:3 above). By contrast, the farmer in Gustav Frenssen’s novel who spent his time tossing silver dollars one by one into the village pond was indeed doing something, but not meaningful activity, and thus it was not work.

Safeguarding a rightful wage for everyone who works becomes one of the most important tasks of the state. It is part of the state’s executive power to promote “justitia commutativa” (section 16:2 above), that people receive fair recompense for their work. But what then is a “fair wage?” Work is meaningful only if it takes place within and in keeping with the order of mutual interdependence. This order serves to preserve the physical life of all. Therefore anyone doing meaningful work has a claim that from his wages his daily physical needs are secure. Notice: secure!

The economic scene in daily life fluctuates like the

mercury in a barometer—high and low and in the middle ranges unstable. According to the law, as Joseph already perceived in Egypt, after seven fat years come seven lean ones, and in place of meaningful work for everyone there come times of unemployment for many.

Whether one operates as did Joseph in Egypt, anticipating the coming barometric low by storing grain for all, or whether during the fat years all workers receive more than is needed for their daily needs and can save for the rainy day on their own, in any case all advance preparation for that time acknowledges the order of economic interdependence. Material goods at our disposal that go beyond what we need for daily life we call “property.” Juridically viewed, goods for daily needs are also property. A wage is therefore “fair” only if it vouchsafes the worker enough “property” beyond daily needs that he is safe also in the time of need. Whether that property, those possessions, are in a bank account or in some real estate, or in a rightful claim on a pension for the time when he cannot work (unemployed, disabled, or simply old age)—none of that makes a significant difference.

In the order of economic interdependence possessions fulfill additional functions. For they can also be squandered or wasted. Therefore according to the law of equitable recompense (receiving what you have coming to you), having possessions at all can be a reward for practicing thrift. According to that law property rewards may be greater or smaller. With indolent work it remains small, by industrious work it can grow. Having a “little place out in the country” serves only the one who owns it, but a farmer supplies the needs of many from the land he owns. In the economic interdependence order, where we all exist, it is not that everyone is dependent on everybody,

but often many are dependent on one individual. And this individual may often be one who doesn't actually "do" much all day, but sits and thinks, and in this way brings as much benefit to a great number of people as do a thousand others all together.

To achieve such an advantage, whether imagined or de facto, is the desire of everyone who rightfully believes that effort expended will bring reward either for themselves or their offspring. In this case we see that because of greater reward, achievements of greater significance also exercise greater attraction. In the end possessions beyond daily needs are there so that one person need not become another person's unnecessary burden in times of need. And conversely for those with possessions beyond daily needs, they are able to help others who suffer through no fault of their own in such times.

[Final half coming next week:

3. The Godliness of the Economic Order and its Vulnerability
4. Economic Order in the New Testament – "Apostolic Economics"]

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## Youth Ministry in America

Colleagues,

There were seven of us kids in my family, a farm family in northwestern Illinois, six brothers and one sister. The line began in 1930 and continued till #7 arrived in 1944—Ed, Mary

Ann, Bob, Don, Ted, Art, Dave. Because of our Lutheran pastor's advice, Mom and Dad saw to it that we could go to college if we wanted to. Given the churchly realities of the day, that meant Valparaiso University. Five of us did. In the prior generation Grandpa and Grandma Schroeder had seen to it—doubtless also because of pastoral advice—that their two youngest daughters, my Aunt Marie and Aunt Martha, had begun the tradition and “gone to Valpo.” By now the number of our clan with VU degrees is twenty-something.

The five of us who went to Valpo all wound up as “church workers.” Our two brothers who chose to follow in dad's footsteps started farming right out of high school.

[You can guess which of the seven became millionaires. Though that isn't so astounding when you consider that a mere 250 acres of land, when it's now valued at \$4000 per acre, is already a million. Our dad paid \$35 per acre when he bought the “home place” in 1939. But as one farmer brother says: “So it's a million, but you can't eat dirt.” Ooops, I'm getting carried away by natal nostalgia. But there ARE stories there.]

Number five in the sibling lineup is Ted who offers this week's ThTh post. Ted got his Valpo B.A. in 1958, the first graduate in the brand new Youth Leadership Training Program that the university and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod had put together. After 15 years as a pioneer in that vocation, he paused to come to Concordia Seminary in 1973 to complete an M.Div. degree. 'Course, that was the year that the roof blew off at Concordia Seminary and Seminex rose from the ruins. Even beyond that Ted's had an interesting ride. But let him tell you that himself as he reviews this book on youth ministry in the USA.

Peace and Joy!

**WHEN GOD SHOWS UP, a History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America,  
by Mark H. Senter III, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI. 2010  
384 pages. Paperback. \$26.99 [Amazon. \$19.70]**

A review by Ted Schroeder

Although I spent the first fifteen years of my church professional life serving as a parish youth director/minister (1958 to 1973), I had not thought much about the history of youth ministry or that there might be patterns or cycles which recur from time to time. I had while in grad school done research on the early Directors of Christian Education in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (then my home church), finding that I was more or less at the beginning of the second generation of that movement.

These early DCEs had been male parochial school teachers (and a few deaconesses) who were called by congregations which had no parochial schools to develop other venues for the faith education of the congregation's children. As they developed their skills, these DCEs expanded into programming for all members of the parish; and some became noted especially for their creative youth ministries.

In WHEN GOD SHOWS UP Mark Senter says that the development of early Protestant youth ministry was prompted by the movement of young people out into the world of work, notably away from the home into the city. A generation or two later, it was the creation of public high schools which drew young people away

from the home and out into the world. In both instances, the Church's response was to protect its youth by creating programs which encouraged faith and faithfulness in the face of peer pressures. Senter especially focuses on ministries which sought to create a spiritual environment in which conversion could be experienced.

The Sunday school movement arose in England and spread to the USA long before the development of public high schools. This was not Sunday school as most of us experienced it, but congregational efforts to reach out to young working people on their one free day (before the five day work week). In addition to providing wholesome social opportunities and encouraging faith and conversions, the Sunday School movement also promoted literacy among youth who were often educationally deficient.

Parish ministers and lay leaders who most successfully developed youth ministries soon found themselves sought out for basic HOW TO information. Senter notes that this often evolved into the development of print materials and the organizing of parachurch associations such as The American Sunday School Union, YMCA/YWCAs, the Society of Christian Endeavor, (and later) 4-H, Scouting, Campfire, (and still later) Young Life, Campus Life, Youth for Christ and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Senter does not give much attention to the youth ministries or to the youth auxiliaries of mainline Protestant denominations in spite of titling his book "a history of Protestant youth ministry." The Protestants on whom he focuses were (as before noted) seeking 'born again' experiences for those whom they target.....and promoting temperance.

Senter does make several observations which I found significant. Repeatedly he notes that most Protestant youth ministry focused and focuses almost exclusively on white middle or upper-middle

class kids.

As he ends his book Senter acknowledges that he has said little or nothing about ministry in Black, Hispanic or Asian Protestant churches. Having spent nearly thirty years as pastor in a Black community, I had noted this omission and remembered with great admiration some of the Black church youth ministries I have witnessed. Frequently these are ministries which encourage youth to claim their special role of being in but not of the world, seeing that their history, their ethnic heritage brings special gifts to the world and the Church. Senter goes nowhere near such a vision or calling for Christian youth anywhere in this book.

Another of Senter's observations is that youth ministries of the past have had significant impact on the ministry choices of 21st Century congregations-both for good and for ill. On the positive side, I have often reflected on the now sainted leaders of the national Walther League and the Luther Leagues in the '50s and '60s and my conviction that they led many a young Lutheran to become and to do much that I now admire in the ELCA . . . and some very significant persons who serve within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

But on the negative side, Senter is also spot on. Youth ministries which were mostly fun and games have also (sadly) affected the church of the 21st century.

The best part of Senter's book is the last page, the epilogue, titled "So Where Do We Go from Here?" He asks ten questions which everyone who is concerned about the life of the Christian congregation and passionate about youth will want to reflect upon deeply and prayerfully.

Here's a sample:

*"Youth ministry in America totally misses close to three-*

*quarters of the adolescent population in America. How will Protestant youth ministry CHANGE to meet that challenge?"*

Note that word CHANGE. Senter began by noting that Protestant youth ministry has been almost exclusively about protecting ITS youth. But clearly, even that isn't happening.

Change should not mean imitating the world. But it does require major transformation, if we of the Christian Church are going to discover the meaning of the Gospel for that seventy-five percent we are MISSING. Surely that applies also to all ministries of the Church and the persons of all ages whom it hopes to reach.

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## **Faith Alone—Still a Minority Opinion?**

Colleagues,

FYI, here's a slice of recent correspondence.

One of my good friends in the American Society of Missiology is Dana L. Robert, Professor of World Mission. Boston University. School of Theology, since 1984. She is one of the superstars in the field. Her publications list is loooong. At discussions arising at the annual meeting of the ASM (coming up again next weekend) she and I are often on the same page. A lifelong Methodist, she frequently draws on Lutheran Reformation theology when at the mike. So last time I asked her: How come? "Well," she said, "my doctorate is from Yale. George Lindbeck and Jaroslav Pelikan, Paul Holmer were my teachers. What else would



you expect?"

Last week Thursday (June 3) Dana gave the opening address at the 100th anniversary celebration in Edinburgh, Scotland, commemorating the pioneering 1910 World Missionary Conference held in that city. [You can find it on the web. Just Google her name.]

But that is not where I wanted to go with this one. Maybe next time, or after our own ASM meeting next weekend. Dana and I occasionally post each other via email. Not long ago I sent her this:

*Dear Dana, In yesterday's weekly print edition (May 17, 2010) of the Christian Science Monitor, we have this quotation from "Stephen Prothero, [who] is a professor of religion at Boston University, specializing in American religion."*

*"In Christianity the problem is sin, the solution (or goal) is salvation, the technique for achieving salvation is some combination of faith and good works."*

*If that quote is accurate, Prothero's "specialization in American religion" needs remedial help, possibly from a BU course in Reformation Theology 101. Or just a brief Kaffeeklatsch with you.*

*Even if one doesn't read Latin, Luther's "sola fide" for salvation is easily translatable into the English of "American religion." And it is not a faith-and combination.*

*Despite the shrinking numbers, there are still millions of USA Lutherans who decry the "combination" model that your colleague proposes. Often so daring as to cite St. Paul (Galatians) as their ally, they even go so far as to designate the combo model an "other " gospel. Taking their more immediate cues from the*

*Augsburg Confession's 1520 protest contra the semi-pelagianism of late medieval church life, some of them still are "protestant" when faith-and-works-salvation pops up again in more modern versions.*

*Sounds like Prothero needs some help. Isn't this a case, Dana, of Esther 4:14B? Seems so to me. And you are THERE! And so is he!*

*Peace and Joy! Ed Schroeder*

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Dear Ed, He's at the Boston University's Religion department, not over where I am in BU's School of Theology. But he was my student. I tried.

Dana

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So I wrote to Prothero myself.

*Dear Stephen, I don't know you, but I do know Dana Robert. She told me that she was once your teacher. Your recent prose in the Christian Science Monitor caught my attention, and I sent Dana this note:*

*[And then I copied to him my letter to Dana printed above.]*

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And he responded.

In a message dated 5/18/10 11:58:27 AM, prothero@bu.edu writes:

*If you read my Christianity chapter in my book I don't think you'll be upset. That said, I stand by what I said, though I*

would never stand by your reading of it. Note first of all that I am trying to sum up the purpose/goal/technique of Christianity in one sentence. So there has to be some generalization going on. Second, I am describing CHRISTIANITY, not Protestantism or even Lutheranism. In the Christian tradition, Christians fight as you well know about what combination of faith and works is required for salvation. Some Protestants of course go the faith only route, though as Nancy Ammerman of BU has discovered MANY Protestants today are "Golden Rule" Christians who believe you are saved basically by works. Catholics of course have typically said you need both. But the broader point is that Christians debate what combination is necessary. Finally, I would add that I don't believe even "sola fides" Protestants really think the mix is 100-0. Most will go for at least 99% to 1%, which is still a combination. The faith of the axe murderer is suspect only because the "works" work against him.

This won't satisfy you, of course, but it may explain what I was doing in that particular sentence.

Steve

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So I responded:

In a message dated 5/18/10 11:58:27 AM, prothero@bu.edu writes:

Second, I am describing CHRISTIANITY, not Protestantism or even Lutheranism. Steve, Ay, there's the rub.

Just as there are many DIFFERENT world religions, as your CSM page so rightly claims—and they are NOT going up the same mountain—so also there are many different Christianities (plural)—also not going up the same mountain. Sola fide

Augsburg confessionalism and semi-pelagianism (or full-force pelagianism) are not scaling the same mountain. These are two different mountains each claiming to be authentic Christ-grounded responses to what happened on Mt. Tabor and Mt. Calvary. Any “combination of faith and works for salvation” is de facto semi-pelagianism. In its pure form a millennium and a half ago in the time of Augustine it was officially declared to be heresy. That negative verdict (even if mistaken) says: You and we are not climbing the same mountain.

[You might be interested in my review yrs ago of S. Mark Heim’s SALVATIONS (accent on the plural). <https://crossings.org/thursday/2001/thur0125.shtml#book>]

Ditto for different mountains in the several different versions of ISLAM. That’s true, I’d say, even if they were not at times eliminating their opponents for being too “other-ish” about what the mountain really is.

And might this also be true about Buddhism vis-a-vis what’s going on in Bangkok these days?

Long time ago our pastoral conference here in St. Louis listened to a Reformed Jewish rabbi take us through a new translation of the Hebrew scriptures done by Jewish scholars. Somewhere along the line someone asked him: “Would an orthodox Jewish rabbi agree with this exegesis you’ve just given us of this passage?” Answer: “No. That’s a different religion.”

Even if these 3 world religions do have more commonalities among their various denominations, amongst Christians it’s patently a corpus mixtum.

My suggestion for a definition of the abstraction “Christianity” is to say: Except for Jesus being central in

some way, thereafter things get fuzzy. First of all, in what way is Jesus central? New Moses? Guru? Suffering Servant?

Already in the NT documents there is conflict about the meaning of following Christ. The common denominator among these conflicting groups was their claim to be doing just that: following Christ. But from that agreed-upon traffic circle the roads went off in different directions. In the 2000 years of church history since then, that traffic pattern hasn't changed.

Then as now, all Christians are not going up the same "Christian" mountain. From Mt. Calvary they go off in different directions to climb denominationally specific mountains. Some of these individual denominational mountains are more patently Calvary-congruent (*theologia crucis*) than others (*theologia gloriae*). But that debate continues. It was always so.

Perhaps it's your chosen term "COMBINATION of faith and works" that caught my attention. Fundamental in the Augsburg Confession (1530) and Melanchthon's defense thereof [*Apologia* (1531)] is his exegetical sortie through the NT for the [in Latin] "*particulae exclusivae*," those "little words" (particles) in the NT Greek text that "exclude" all attempts to add something to faith alone. I.e., any attempt to propose "combinations" of faith and something else as the basis for salvation. In his rhetoric "combination" is a dirty word. He claims to have NT support in these exclusive particles in the Greek language. And he was a super-pro in Greek. So he might be right.

Does CSM ever publish op ed pieces? You're in Boston. That's their home base too, right? Why don't you check.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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So far, no rejoinder.

Another item about faith alone.

In the kerfuffle about faith in St. Paul's theology—is it the faith OF Jesus, or faith IN Jesus, that rescues sinners—one of the major players on the “OF” side is Douglas A. Campbell (Duke University professor) with his 1000-page “The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul” (2009).

In an interview that I found on the web, there was this:

*How does your understanding of the nature of the Christ-event differ from standard Evangelical-Reformed and Barthian approaches? I would want to suggest fairly firmly that it doesn't, although a lot depends on what you mean by the word “standard” here. I view my understanding as a thoroughly Evangelical (particularly in the broader, German sense), Reformed, and Barthian construal of the Christ event that draws directly on theological work that stands squarely in these interpretative traditions—especially Irenaeus, the late Augustine, the Cappadocians, Athanasius, Calvin, parts of Luther, McLeod Campbell, Barth, and the Torrances. (Some of my colleagues at Duke insist that Aquinas and/or Wesley, rightly understood, belong here as well!) Indeed, I see myself very much as attempting to clarify and affirm this set of traditions as clearly as I can. But I hope that my understanding is also thoroughly catholic as well, not to mention Catholic in the best sense.*

*I view Ernst Käsemann as wonderfully insightful, but also deeply ambivalent. Although associated with apocalyptic, and clear-sightedly opposed to any foundationalist salvation-history, much of his reconstrual is still quite Lutheran, and*

*that makes him something of a mixed bag for me.*

So maybe it's NOT "just exegesis," but confessional commitments, that are the deep center of this debate.

Notice this: "PARTS of Luther," but no such "parts" on the list of recent Reformed theologians. And that Käsemann reference! "Still quite Lutheran, and (therefore) a mixed bag for me."

Sounds like another verification of Bertram's axiom: "Biblical hermeneutics is at no point separate from Biblical soteriology." [RSV: "How you read the Bible is at no point separate from how you think people get saved."] Faith alone is about how people get saved. It's also the Lutheran lens for how to read the Bible.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder