

# “Did Osama Win?”

Colleagues

“Did Osama Win?” That was the caption of a NEWSWEEK feature article for last month’s tenth anniversary of 9/11. A strange article. But then again, maybe not so strange, just typically American. First off, author Andrew Sullivan begins with paragraph after paragraph signaling a “yes” answer, though without actually saying “yes.” Then at the very end he says “Not at all” and offers a “quickie-gospel” of hope to make Americans winners after all. Here’s how.

Osama the winner.

“How carefully Osama had set the trap and how guilelessly I—we—had walked right into it. We need to understand that 9/11 worked. It worked as a tactic to induce American self-destruction.”

“Only one word really sufficed to define the scale and gravity of what had taken place: war. And in that very formulation, in the depths of our psyches and souls, we took the bait. The bait was meant to entice the United States into ruinous polarizing religious warfare.”

“It looks obvious now. It wasn’t then. We were seized with righteous rage.”

“In our panic, fear kept spiraling upward.”

“Fear dominated . . . as a majority of Americans . . . supported the war that handed bin Laden exactly what he wanted. What he wanted . . . was central relevance to the power shifts in the Middle East, and U.S. troops in lands they could never understand and never fully win over. History has proven him right on that.”

“The fiscal costs of our actions are the reason we find ourselves today in a lost, jobless, debt-driven decade.” And the author’s chronicle goes on and on.

Yet when it comes to closure, we read this: “So, did bin Laden succeed? Not at all.” NOT AT ALL? And why not? “He didn’t banish American influence in the Middle East.” Is that supposed to be victory for the USA with its economy in shambles—and fear as unabated as ever? “His dream of a caliphate is more remote than ever.” Big deal. The “Asian models of capitalism” in “Turkey’s and Indonesia’s evolutions have shown a different way forward for Islamist democratic politics.” Huh? That gives America the blue ribbon?

This closure sounds almost like that caricature sermon of 29 and one-half minutes of hellfire-and-brimstone and then a thundering closing sentence: “Believe in Jesus and everything will be OK!”

Sullivan grants that fear in America has not yet been dealt with, though he’s unable to link that to Osama, won’t grant him victory here, here at the very jugular. “Bin laden . . . failed, in other words. But our own fear won. [Who, pray tell, triggered all that?] Fear stopped us, overwhelmed us, as our rationality deserted us. Yes, it was understandable, given what we endured that September morning. But we need to admit that our response was close to fatal. A bankrupted America that tortured innocents and disregarded its own Constitution is barely recognizable as America.” [No, Osama did not win!]

“We have survived and endured as a civilization because we have recognized our errors and corrected most of them. [Huh? Name one!] That capacity is proof that our democracy still lives. [Proof?] But fear is a tougher enemy than mere mistakes. It can only be overcome by hope. And hope is a choice, not a fate.”

“Until we decide to grasp hope again, the war will live on.

Within us all. Waiting for resolution.”

When he brings in hope to cope with fear, Sullivan is patently moving into theology. But, of course, when he speaks of fear, he was already on that turf. But the fear he’s talking about, nationwide and lethal as he depicts it, is—as Jesus had to tell his critics—still a shallow fear. Superficial. Under-diagnosed. Fearing the wrong thing, the wrong object. In Luke’s rendering Jesus tells his audience not to fear those whose threats, yes, even lethal threats, to “only” our bodily life, but we are to fear The One who is able to terminate our total existence, namely, our creator. “Yes, I tell you, fear HIM!”

In the unique alchemy of Biblical reality, Jesus is here repeating the primal OT axiom: God is the only proper object of our fear. Inherent in the first commandment—to have no other gods besides the only God there is—is the injunction to fear no other threatening power or person, except God alone. Makes sense: the giver of life and the taker of life is the same one (Deut. 32:39). So to fear bin Laden is already breaking the first commandment! Fearing a false god. Ouch!

But that is where we must move if we are going to cope with fear. Fear is a God-problem. When President Roosevelt told fearful Americans during World War II “We have nothing to fear but fear itself,” he was articulating the American alternative to the Biblical “We have nothing to fear but God himself.” To be diagnosed as having “no fear of God” (Rom. 3:18) is something fearful indeed. Reciting the American mantra doesn’t make fear – even wrongful fear – go away. For fear is not the product of a decision. It is a response to something coming to us from the outside, in the end always a death-threat. And until that something-from-the-outside is undone, the fear can’t be eliminated. [For the full scoop on this, see Bob Bertram’s “Has America lost the ability to fear

God?" <https://crossings.org/newsletr/advent2000/inability.shtml>]

Sullivan recites the mantra once more, offering to trump fear with his own quickie-gospel of hope in his last four sentences: "And hope is a choice, not a fate. Until we decide to grasp hope again, the war will live on. Within us all. Waiting for resolution." Didja hear that? Osama hasn't won. Hasn't won yet. We can do it. Stop fearing. Start hoping.

Fear and hope are opposites, yes. One anticipates death around the corner, the other life. When the proper object of fear (God) is in the equation, then the word "faith" is the more frequent Biblical correlative opposite. But hope and faith are Siamese twins. Faith is what your heart is hanging on now. Hope is that very heart-hanging projected into the future.

But neither one is a choice, a naked decision. Each is a response to something coming from the outside. Fear, proper fear, God-focused fear, is the fitting response to the word of God the critic. [But God-the-critic is hard to sell in the USA where our knee-jerk conviction is that God is committed – yea, obligated – to bless America.] Faith/hope is the fitting response to God's word of promise. But you don't "choose" hope. You can only have hope when you've heard a word that trumps the word that elicits fear. Sullivan has no such word, not even in some secular format. His hope has no foundation. It floats in the air. He's calling us to be hopeful by merely choosing it, even though his entire chronicle before his quickie-closure is a jeremiad that can only elicit fear. Even if it is fear of the wrong thing. Without some ground for hope – even shallow god-less hope – such calling us to "decide to grasp hope again" is ostrich-with-head-in-the-sand. Biblical term for that is blindness. And not fearing God is blindness big-time.

One of the earliest semester-long Crossings courses, offered

somewhere in the 1980s, was Course #507 "Crossings from Ephesians: Hope Needs Success." The Biblical text for that course was the 2nd lesson for the Ascension of our Lord, Ephesians 1:16-23, where the apostle prays "that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the HOPE to which he has called you," then goes ballistic in portraying the success, Christ's success, that grounds this hope. "The immeasurable greatness of God's power FOR US who believe . . . in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand . . . far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

It's the theology of Christ's ascension, his victory parade. Victory over what? Victory over death, the ultimate enemy, the terrorist at the end of the chain of all human fears.

If just reading the apostle's hyperbole doesn't leave you breathless, nothing will. And what it says is also breathtaking – success beyond all successes. Raised him from the dead. That's the biggie. Head over all things. All things under his feet. Every name that is named. All the names at the end of the fear-chain – not only in this age, but also in the age(s) to come.

Even low-level hopes needs some success somewhere. Christian hope "is built on nothing less than" that Christic success. With death undone, what's left to fear, but God's own self. And that fear, that rightful fear, is itself trumped by God's own self at Christ's Easter and Ascension. Here coming to us from the outside is "the immeasurable greatness of God's power FOR US who believe . . . in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand."

But to get to that hope, brother Sullivan, we need to let go of the skinny hope you propose –“that our democracy still lives on.” Whether that is de facto true right now, or that it will remain to be true, is not so obvious, precisely in view of the chronicle of defeat that you give us in 95% of your article. But even if it should prove true, for a while, at least, our national future would indeed really be hopeFULL if we were to switch our fear to fear’s proper object.

How about this whimsy? We switch the mantra printed on American money from “In God we trust” to “It is God we fear.” And from that proper fear, we might just be open for switching our hope too. So on the obverse side of our money we put “In God we hope.” Law and Gospel on every penny, every dollar bill!

Biblical word for such turn-around – to right sort of fear, to successful hope – is repentance. Biblically understood, repentance is not breast-beating, but “simply” turning around, to a better fear, a better hope. Though the actual turning around is not simple, of course. It’s a crucifixion. But then, when hope’s words come in, it’s Easter. Spelled out in the ThTh 695 segment on Repentance. “that the old Adam in us. . . . should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up.” (Luther: Small Catechism).

But could an entire nation do anything like that? ThTh posts in the past have reported Abraham Lincoln’s bold move to do just that during the suicidal carnage of the American Civil War. Congress even passed the resolution! If/when (God forbid) the carnage gets closer to Washington DC, as it did during the Civil War, who knows what a gridlocked government might not do.

While we’re brainstorming such a nation-wide endeavor, why not hustle “just” American Christians to do so, folks for whom

“fearing God, repenting, trusting God’s promise” is not alien rhetoric? Especially here at the end of October, with Reformation Day coming up in a few days. Remember that very first one of Luther’s 95 theses: “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said ‘Repent,’ he called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” Well, then, at the very least, “Lutherans, remember . . . . ”

Such an idea—Lutherans, remember!—has precedent. Marvin Huggins of the Concordia Historical Institute has recently unearthed and sent me the text of a parallel plea “just to Christians” during the Civil War from the patriarch of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, C.F.W.Walther. Marie and I have translated it from Walther’s German. It’s appended below. You’ll be able to make the crossing to today’s world without assistance. Until such a repentant turn-around in America’s fears and hopes takes place, it’ll be increasingly difficult to avoid saying yes to Sullivan’s question, “Did Osama win?”

How about asking “Did God win?” For God to win – win us, that is – and for God’s success to be “success for us,” as the apostle puts it in that hope-hyped text from Ephesians, there’s only one way that’s hopeful. It’s that number one thesis of the famous ninety-five.

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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[Front page. First article.]  
Der Lutheraner [The Lutheran]  
Volume 18. St. Louis, Mo. August 20. 1861

Der Lutheraner is published biweekly. One year’s subscription costs one dollar for subscribers outside of St. Louis. In St.

Louis the cost is 5 cents for each issue.

Editor's foreword to the 18th volume of the Lutheraner.

A time of God's severe visitation has come upon our land. A bloody civil war has broken out among us, a war which already has swept thousands swiftly and suddenly from time into eternity. [Ed. Hostilities began on April 12, 1861] The future lies grim and dark before us. God has now finally begun to punish our people for their sins with his hard rod and, as it appears, this rod is still held high overhead for new and ever harder blows.

O dear Christian Lutheran reader, let us humble ourselves under God's mighty hand! Far be it from us in this current disaster encompassing our entire land, simply to see this divine punishment as coming because of the non-Christians and unbelievers.

Let us take to heart especially now what St. Peter once wrote to Christians in his day in a time of great and widespread turmoil: "The time has come for judgment to begin with the house of God," that is, with the church, the believers. (1 Peter 4.17)

It is not only Satan who in such times zeroes in on the church at large and on individual Christians to make them fall into apostasy; God himself begins the judgment specifically with his house, his children. Granted, it is not to bring them to ruin, but much more to galvanize, to strengthen and to confirm them.

But this can only happen if we do not respond as Pharisees, "We thank you, God, that we are not like other people." Rather, in deepest humility and genuine contrition let us admit that we too have carried wood to the fire of God's wrath, which now threatens to consume our land and its present-day incomparable prosperity. So what do we say?

The Lord says, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." (Luke 12:48) And we Christians are precisely those people, for more has been given and more has been entrusted to us than to the poor blind children of this world. So it is from us that much will be required, from us more will be demanded. When we examine ourselves, we see all manner of sin and faithlessness. We are lackadaisical about the word of God, deficient in love, humility, gentleness and patience, mean-spirited, addicted to things of this earth, at peace with the world, lethargic in prayer and watchfulness, ungrateful and dissatisfied, and the like.

Rather than being those who rushed to the wall to stand in the breach against God's judgment on behalf of our land that he not destroy it (Ezek.22:30), we have instead joined in tearing down that wall and making the breach even wider. For surely, had Christians been more faithful, had they rightly understood and exercised their callings in the world, what has now happened would not have happened.

O dear Christians, let us then not idly wait for a general repentance within our entire American Nineveh, but rather in view of our own large share in this common guilt, simply do our own repentance from the heart. That would be the most effective thing we could do for our native land, so that once more "God's glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other." (Ps. 85:9-10)

Did the Lord not say of the city of Sodom – as Abraham besought the Lord, "Suppose ten righteous are found there"—"For the sake of ten I will not destroy it"? (Gen. 18:32)

If God would not have destined Sodom for destruction, had he

found only TEN righteous people in it, who through genuine repentance and with cries for mercy day and night would have rushed to the wall and stood in the breach, how much less would God give our America up for destruction, how much more would he not call to that flood of catastrophe already rushing toward us: “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped,” (Job 38:11) if only the THOUSANDS of believing Christians who doubtless are still here would awaken and in true repentance acknowledge first their own sins and then the communal sins of our people with fervent, unceasing pleas for grace and rescue in the name of Jesus, and turn to the merciful and long-suffering God!

To God the Lord, who remembers mercy when judgment occurs (Hab.3:2), whose church still stands when all around it staggers and totters and whose Word remains even when heaven and earth pass away, to him be humble praise and thanks that in these days of gloom and doom, he has not let our “Lutheraner” be silenced. May he grant our modest journal to continue to bring witness to the truth granted us in God’s Word into many homes and hearts and in its small way aid and abet the building of God’s Zion here as well. May God grant this for the sake of Jesus Christ, his dear son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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## **Limpet-Mine Theology and Gospel With No Additives**

Colleagues,

Today’s guest essayist is Neal Nuske. He’s appeared here before.

Most recent, so far as I can tell, was ThTh #610 – that’s 86 weeks ago. Neal teaches at St Peter’s College in Queensland, Australia. We’ve never met face-to-face. But we have been in email exchange for a long time. He’ll give you the details below. I didn’t know the meaning of one of his terms in today’s post, “limpet-mine.” Thought it might be something only Aussies understood. So I looked it up. Not Aussie, just plain English. Limpet: “a marine mollusk that browses over rocks or timbers and clings very tightly when disturbed.” Limpet-mine: “an explosive device designed to cling magnetically to the hull of a ship.” That is probably all the introduction you need. Limpet-mine theology is a pejorative term in Neal’s vocabulary. Even so, get ready for some explosive devices in what he tells us below. [For the Latin and Greek terms that Neal uses, I have put (in brackets) English equivalents.]

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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For well over a decade I have been a silent listener from “down-under-land” to numerous theological conversations around the ‘table’ of mehs55@cs.com and an unseen guest in the cyberspace of Crossings! When describing the personal value of such moments to Ed, I suggested it constituted a weekly ‘reconfiguring of the cerebral cortex’.

After teaching classes for a week in the subject areas of Study of Religion – an examinable [Ed:required for the examinations?] course on all the major world religions including Australian indigenous spirituality under the themes: The search of understanding; and The search for meaning, as well as courses on Theory of Knowledge (Epistemology) in the International Baccalaureate program; and, Australia’s involvement in World War 1 and The Pacific War, I would then wander back into the

Mathematics staffroom. Waiting there via email would be the weekly dose of Thursday Theology. I have appreciated the number of times theologians have dared to comment on the problem of human suffering and the existential implications of the suffering Christ -a reflective domain where it could be suggested that fools may walk in where even angels fear to tread in an attempt to construct theodicy. Such has not been the case.

My particular interest is in the centrality of the 'theology of the cross'. That was the theme of my Final Year Thesis required of us at Luther Seminary in Adelaide in the 1970's. I discovered that one cannot reflect on Luther's theology of the cross without taking into consideration two critical themes in Lutheran theology: these are deus absconditus [God hidden] and deus revelatus [God revealed]. I appreciated deeply the way Elert clarified the distinctions and developed the implications of deus absconditus and deus revelatus in *The Structure of Lutheranism*.

What seemed an obscure theological work to some of my fellow students was to me a source of clarity, not because Elert resolved the tensions in some pathetic form of theodicy, but because he kept the paradox sharp and intense with no compromise to that innate desire of human reason to make God a rationally palatable and reasonable deity. I think that is why Luther called reason a whore. Its default response is to attempt to dissolve the tension and thereby prostitute faith so that it ends up as a form of consent to a list of theological propositions rather than a life of trust in the one who lived and died pro nobis [for us].

I encountered deus absconditus at age twelve when struck by a radical and rare form of childhood cancer which resulted in surgery. The consequent hemipelvectomy left me disfigured for life. Hemipelvectomy is a radical form of surgical crucifixion

whereby, for the sake of life itself, one is left hanging on the cross of disability. I have been there for 48 years.

I continued to encounter deus absconditus in the lives of my parishioners and later in the lives of my students when I moved into a Chaplaincy-teaching position. I buried many of them. Some died from cancer. One took his own life. In the weeks following that experience my students continued to reflect on the meaning, or lack of meaning, in this experience since the student was a member of the class I was teaching at the time.

I was also doing a course work Master of Educational Studies at The University of Queensland in the area of Curriculum Design. My supervisor, Associate Professor Jim Butler, suggested that I convert to a Research Masters Degree in order to explore how the concept tragedy could be treated in the classroom through an examination of the way various World Religions responded to human suffering. I did so successfully under the topic: Design for adolescents to integrate tragedy into their world-view. We had many discussions about the use of the term 'integrate' because we agreed that tragedy was a paradox, an inexplicable experience which 'rattled' world-views and in some instances blew cognitive universes apart irrevocably. Tragedy is a theological super-nova.

What remains after such an explosion? What is gospel?

I wondered what kind of theological wall Humpty Dumpty sat upon. As a result of the fall, was it only Humpty who was shattered, or was the wall itself also irreparably fractured? Did the edifice of theology remain intact maintaining its apprehensions of static truth while the fractured, alienated human being looked on in bewildered disbelief, or did the wall itself also collapse?

In its infinite 'wisdom' deus absconditus decided to revisit

once more in November 2010 when our son Jeremy aged 29 took his own life after a long struggle with depression. Jan and I entered a cosmic black hole along with our daughter Renee, her husband Tim with their children Harper and Marlo. Marlo entered our world four days before Jeremy took his own life and left our world. That blinding supernova filled our world with a heap of cosmic dust and shit.

Across from another world came the very human and pastoral voices of Ed and Marie. In one of my emails I introduced Ed to the notion of 'reconfiguring the cerebral cortex'. I had also thrown in another concept formed in the midst of the cosmic dust. This I called "limpet-mine-theology". At the time Ed and Marie were in 'exodus' mode, breaking camp and taking another step in that pilgrimage to the promised land. Subsequent to some of the dust settling after their 'reshuffle' Ed replied asking if I would consent to send out one of my replies which elucidated the meaning of the concept "limpet-min e-theology."

I agreed and have exercised some editorial freedom, taking out some of my more colourful language and providing a context as outlined above. At the heart of my email to Ed was the implicit question: What is the purpose of theological reflection? What is the purpose of dogma? What is gospel for those who live with mental illness? What follows is largely the email.

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In the midst of the existential wreckage precipitated by personal loss it has occurred to Jan and me that many formulations/descriptions/explanations of the gospel, and Christian dogma for that matter, come from sharp thinkers, cognitively intact human beings, high-level-functioning human beings.

Such individuals are, of course, important for many reasons.

They are a gift for us because there is always the danger of 'flat-earth advocates' rising up and swamping us with their particular notions/definitions/formulations of the 'gospel.'

Sharp-thinkers keep our conceptual world reconfigured so that the word 'gospel' remains 'gospel' – the life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

On the other hand, as Church history has ticked on, 'additional theological ideas' can attach themselves, some like limpet-mines, to 'gospel,' for example, 'gospel' + cultural issues, 'gospel' + 'normal' gender orientation – as if those who are different cannot possibly love Christ; or, to put it in gospel order, Christ cannot love those who are different.

The end result of that particular configuration is moralism and no gospel for those who are in most need of it.

I guess the prime work of Lutheran theology is to prevent "limpet-mine theology" from attaching extras to 'gospel' so that the 'satis' [it is enough] is lost and swamped by additions deemed important for various reasons. To prevent "limpet-mine theology" adhering itself to 'gospel,' some intense and focussed theological analysis and critical thinking always has to take place.

I have been grateful for your insights over the years.

Any student of theology, hopefully, will work their way into the world of theological ideas and discover that to 'do theology' is a *vocatio* [calling] burdened by the never-ending process of clarifying and revisiting central theological terms. Add to the cognitive experience of studying theology the experience of living life – existence itself.

This too can 'stuff-up' the mental world because there are times

when bucket loads of shit keep pouring down from above.

So, when you get into those heavenly-realms, Ed, you best find a good plumber up there and tell him/her, on our behalf, that something has gone wrong with the heavenly sewerage system. Enough for the moment because the deus absconditus is alive and well, spreading manure everywhere.

Recently we have asked ourselves: What is 'gospel' for the 'insane'?

What is 'gospel' for those who are mentally fragile, unable to live because of an inability to function either in response to a genetic disposition, or in response to the degenerative impact of brain physiology, brain chemistry? Behind all that is: What is 'gospel' for our Jeremy? What is 'gospel' for those who destroy themselves by taking their own lives? Gospel is gift of grace -no "limpet-mines" need to be attached to gospel.

We have concluded that much is added on to the word 'gospel.'

I am reminded of some of those TV ads which begin with an offer for a Knife-Sharpener. Then comes the extra knife, and, before one realises it, there are a thousand attachments all designed to enrich life. You know the routine - 'and there's more!' One is subsequently offered forks, spoons, free holidays, a new kitchen, etc!

In the theological world we find parallels in "limpet-mine-additives" such as: 'pure' gospel - as if the single word 'gospel' is not enough. If it is impure gospel then it is not gospel.

Or it becomes: 'gospel' + inerrancy, 'gospel' + normality, 'gospel' + success, 'gospel' + creationism, 'gospel' + doctrine, 'gospel' + literalism, 'gospel' + church order/structure,

'gospel' + the political-right, etc.

Before one realises it, there are a hundred formulations (limpet-mines) on offer and the cross disappears behind a wall, a morass of cognitive additions. Such additions are mostly a result of theologians earnestly trying to preserve the truth. However, in reality, 'truth' preserves us because 'truth' is not a cognitive theological construct. It is the crucified and resurrected One. So it seems to me the purpose of theological reflection is to break down walls rather than build them around the cross.

While we struggle 'to get it right' in our heads, Christ 'gets it right' for our existence. We have discovered that the experience of suffering strips away much crap; and, if there is not a crucifix in the centre of one's cognitive world, it all becomes a very bleak experience.

I am reminded of that simple Nursery Rhyme: Humpty is shattered. I think the wall is also shattered. Indeed, it must shatter so that the cross does not remain hidden and become displaced by theodicy and rationalizations about God. There is nothing more destructive to the essence of Lutheran theology than confusing theodicy with gospel. Or, to put it another way, attempting to reconcile deus absconditus with deus revelatus. I don't believe the concept deus revelatus was meant to sanitize the concept deus absconditus.

Such will also be the case when we face thanatos [death] – indeed there is more ahead. It is good to know the Shepherd walks ahead with us into death when we ourselves will become childlike again. We have a deep sense of peace about our son Jeremy, all the while living with the loss. We don't understand what the frequently used term 'closure' means.

Teaching 16 and 17 year olds the subject Study of Religion has

given me insights into how many 'limpet-mines' have been attached to 'gospel' so much so that 'gospel' itself is hidden behind the wall of theology. I call it "limpet-mine-theology" because it usually blows-up in the face of the harsh realities in life, and gives no assurance in the face of the inscrutable and unanswerable perplexities of ordinary existence. What then is gospel? What is faith?

A Year 12 (17 year old) student once asked me if I believed 'in the Bible'.

I answered: "No."

When asked "Why not?"

I replied that the Bible was not crucified for me, nor did the Bible die on the cross for me, nor did God raise the Bible from death for me. We had time to explore further this issue. I explained that the sacred text of Christianity was a pointer to the person who was the central figure in this Christian narrative. The class was: The Art of Hermeneutics. (It is extraordinary how interested young adults are in hermeneutics.)

This led to an interesting discussion on the role and importance of sacred texts across world religions and, in particular Christianity. In this class we compared Salvador Dali's The Christ of St John of the Cross (1951) with Gruenewald's Isenheim Altarpiece (c.1515). Students observed that Dali's Christ is anonymous, faceless, hair neatly positioned, no crown of thorns, untouched by the impact of crucifixion, bloodless, without inscription, and detached from the created world. In contrast Gruenewald's Christ is thoroughly human, unmistakably twisted and distorted by the crucifixion.

Such questions about sacred texts and about gospel have made me more aware of how much young adults have been given the impression that the essence of Christianity for them is what I

would now call the 'additives' rather than the centre.

So, over the years on many occasions you, together with the various contributors to ThTh, have reconfigured my cerebral-cortex bringing the cross back into focus. I have not always responded to every ThTh; but, I certainly have read them all.

The other significant 'discovery' for Jan and for me has been the importance of liturgy and ritual. When ritual is informed by gospel, it simply 'says it', and in 'saying it', 'does it' for us. This was particularly so during Jeremy's funeral. The great mystery of the pro nobis was therein preserved – not explained – but preserved and given gratis via ritual.

Grace was given gratis to both the community of the faithful and the unfaithful, that is, to those people who were listening, or watching, and to Jeremy lying 'still' in death, inside a coffin. I suppose some might think I am guilty of 'gospel-reductionism.' If so, to those I would say: Take care. To be visited by deus absconditus is a brutalising experience, so brutalising that the relentless and irrational assaults of deus absconditus can even destroy deus revelatus.

We are survivors, Ed, enduring loss, but not losing our love for life and all we have been given.

Kind regards to you and yours, and keep well in the next phase. Thank you for all you, and your contributors to ThTh, have done for us from afar.

We look forward to see you both 'face to face' on that Day when He who lived and died for us finally polishes the mirror and fixes the bloody plumbing!!!!!! ☐

Neal and Jan

PS How lovely it would be to meet you both, as well as the

numerous contributors, or attend a Crossings Conference. We face the tyranny of distance! Hopefully there will be a section reserved in that great heavenly cyberspace for those fringe-dwelling thinkers and theologians who dare to reflect along the boundaries where life and theology collide.

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## A Parting Peace

Colleagues,

Here's another one resurrected from ancient files [not my own, but from those of the Concordia Historical Institute, whither I directed Lee Precup when he asked me if I could find it. "Our man" at CHI, Marvin Huggins, found it there.] It is the "Parting Peace" of the faculty of Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) to the graduating class of 1972. [Lee was in that class.] Context: the gathering storm in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, labeled by some as the "Battle for the Bible," but in this "parting peace" designated "the controversy about the priority of the Gospel." As some of you may divine—just from that shift to the word Gospel—the author was Robert W. Bertram, at that time Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at the seminary.

A year and a half later, January 20, 1974, the Missouri Synod leaders moved to a "final solution" to the controversy by suspending the seminary president for tolerating teachers of "false doctrine" within the faculty. In the ensuing rumble Concordia Seminary in Exile (Sem-in-ex) was born. For Seminex's decade of existence, the theology of this Parting Peace was our common confession. And by virtue of Bob's becoming the founder of Crossings, it has become ours too.

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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## **A PARTING PEACE**

### **The Week of Pentecost, 1972**

To the Graduates:

You are leaving us and yet you are joining us. We rejoice that you will now be sharing in the ministry of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ with us and more than 6,000 other pastors of our Synod. Our parting word is, therefore, a word of welcome. We welcome you as our partners in a common mission.

Our parting word, our word of welcome, is a word of peace. Not just any peace! It is what our Lord called "my own peace," the hard-won peace of the cross. That peace unites us with God and with one another. It is our common bond and must always have top priority in our teaching and in our life.

The following seven reminders – about repentance, about Sonship, about inspiration, about historical facts, about prophecy, about mission, about peace – are suggested by the Holy Gospel and Epistle for the Feast of Pentecost. With these reminders we bear witness to our faith and proclaim to you again the blessed Gospel which unites us in Christ's own peace.

His peace we leave with you,  
The Faculty

I  
May the Holy Spirit,  
Whom the Father sends in Jesus' name,  
Bring these words to your remembrance:

REPENT . . . . FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS.” (Acts 2:38)

To repent, men need to be more than merely sinners. They need also to be believers. They need the divine Law, yes, and the Law in the fullness of its criticism. How else could they be contrite? But to be truly contrite, to be free enough to take the criticism of the Law, sinners need more. They need the Gospel. “For human nature cannot bear [the divine wrath] unless it is sustained by the Word of God,” that is, the Gospel. (APOLOGY XII, 32). So the call to repentance is not only judgment. It is also the promise of help. “What are we to do?” cried the audience at Pentecost, pleading for help. Peter’s answer, “Repent,” was the help they could trust. Faced with our current synodical problems, you and we and the people of our Synod ask the same question: “What are we to do?” The answer at Pentecost is still our trustworthy help. “Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

We all resist repentance like the plague, preferring not to notice who it is who calls us to repent: the Lord Himself. Instead we play the judge ourselves and shift the blame to others. Some blame everything on our synodical or theological leadership, while others blame those who blame that leadership. Both attitudes are, at best, half right. Both evade their own obligation, and their own opportunity, to repent. So do those who consider our current problems trivial or call themselves neutral and loftily declare, “A plague on both your houses.”

To say “Repent” is no evasion of the hard social and political realities. God uses precisely the realities of history to summon us to repent. And we make bold therefore to call you and all in the Synod – ourselves included – to hear God’s call: “Repent.” Let us repent, we ourselves first of all, and receive from God

the power to walk together in His paths again.

If we find it difficult to repent, that difficulty has been mounting for a long time. It has long roots in our common synodical past. For what penitent sinners need most is faith, faith in God's promised mercy. Only by faith can they accept His judgment without being destroyed by it. "For faith makes the difference between the contrition of Peter and that of Judas." (APOLOGY XII, 8). Only by faith can sinners profit from God's judgment, and even run with it. "Filial fear can be clearly defined as an anxiety joined with faith, . . . whereas in servile fear faith does not sustain the anxious heart." (APOLOGY XII, 38). But have we in our Synod, any of us, always remembered that that is what faith is for: "for the forgiveness of your sins," as Peter promised, so that "you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"? Haven't we instead, far too often, prized our faith for its own correctness, rather than for its hold on that Father who forgives our incorrectness? Or perhaps out of scorn for just such a position, or out of a desire to accommodate our faith to a skeptical culture, have we minimized the reality of the miraculous, forgetting that all the miracles point to that one miracle, "the forgiveness of your sins"? In short, have we Missouri Synod Lutherans so discouraged faith that we lack the boldness and confidence, the sheer audacious courage to repent?

Yet faith is still among us. That we know, for the Word is still among us, both Law and Promise, written and preached and sacramental. We are all of us baptized – "baptized," as Peter reminds us, "for the forgiveness of your sins." And isn't our Baptism itself a sign for our repentance, signifying "that the old Adam in us. . . . should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up . . . ." (SMALL CATECHISM, Baptism, 12) Isn't that sign enough of God's persistent mercy? And where God shows mercy, there is faith; and where faith, repentance; and

where repentance, “the forgiveness of sins” and “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” We heartily desire these gifts by which God will transform our very conflict into an opportunity for new beginnings. We acknowledge our own need for repentance and pray the Father for the strong faith that will enable us to repent.

## II

May the Holy Spirit

Whom the Father sends in Jesus’ name,

Bring these words to your remembrance:

‘HE WHO LOVES ME WILL BE LOVED BY MY FATHER.’ (John 14:21)

How like a father. No one pleases a father quite so much as someone who loves his boy. You fathers among the graduates know from experience how pleasant it is when people admire your offspring. For us faculty too it is gratifying how congregations, districts and the Synod welcome you, our “sons.” Now God our Father declares, “You are pleased with my Son, and so I am pleased with you.” Why is He pleased? “Why does the Father love you?” asks Luther, and answers, “Not because you . . . are beyond reproach in the righteousness of the Law.” (WA XI 1, 371) It is not because we do well or formulate teachings correctly, and not because of deeds performed or doctrines accepted. On that we are all agreed. We are furthermore agreed – all of us in the Synod – that we are the children of God because of His Son. Look what we have in common: nothing less than a gracious Father who loves us and all who love Jesus His Son.

But then could a Synod like ours, bravely confessing the Lutheran Symbols, still be infected with works righteousness? Sad to say, the lust to be right in and of ourselves is a temptation with which each of us must wrestle. Surely no one of us teaches that a man can be saved by his good works or the correct wording of his doctrine. But a form of this false

teaching crouches, ready to spring upon the most devout among us. Take for example the sentence, "Believe the Bible simply because God spoke it, and you will be right." What could possibly be wrong with such a formulation? It sounds so good. And yet, is there not a danger here? Might not this position reduce the whole of Scripture to a law to be obeyed, as though the Scriptures were only a set of orders issued by an Authority who outranks us supremely? Of course the Holy Scriptures are God's authoritative Word. But say we would bow to them in unthinking obedience, responding to all their statements in the same way, with the same unswerving submission. What could possibly be wrong with that? What would we have missed? The most distinctive thing of all: the biblical Gospel, the Good News of the Father who loves us supremely. that is the distinctive "authority," says Paul, "given by the Lord to build you up, not pull you down." (2 Cor. 10:8) It is "such authority to men" as we have from God in Christ Jesus who is distinguished by His "authority on earth to forgive sins" (Matt. 9:6,8) If we were to obscure that distinctive biblical Word, then we would not only have blunted the Law's terrible accusation, but we would also have blurred the unexpected and undeserved miracle of the Good News of our redemption. We would have failed to distinguish between the words God speaks to us, failed to give the varied response God seeks from His varied words to us. We would have failed to hear the Gospel as distinct from the Law.

Listen to the Gospel again. Why does the Father love us, wrong and wicked though we are? Luther answers: Because this Son, "sent from the Father into the world, is pleasing to you," therefore, "the Father loves you and you are pleasing to Him." (WA XL 1, 371) Rightness with God is the free gift of the Father bestowed on sinners because of the Son. It is the Son who reconciles us to the Father and the Father to us (AC III 3; APOLOGY IV 269).

### III

May the Holy Spirit,  
Whom the Father sends in Jesus' name,  
Bring these words to your remembrance:

WHAT "THE HOLY SPIRIT . . . WILL TEACH YOU" IS WHAT "I [JESUS] HAVE TOLD YOU" FIRST OF ALL. (John 14:26)

To the apostles Jesus promised the Spirit, and inspired they were. Let us all in Synod remember how blessed we are to have the inspired Word of inspired men, even as we disagree or fail to understand each other in our efforts to understand that inspiration. And we dare to appeal to all in Synod to bear with one another as together we pray the inspiring Spirit to enable us to grasp aright this inspired Word. We say it again, "the apostles and their word are inspired." About this inspiration we would emphasize one thing especially: the Spirit's link to the historical Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who sent Him and it is Jesus to whom He testifies. The Spirit who inspired the disciples is the same Spirit who had been promised by Jesus. It is that Spirit who led them to remember the things they had witnessed previously and the words the historical, visible and audible Jesus had told them beforehand (John 14:25-26, 29).

Jesus promised his disciples that the Spirit "will teach you everything, and call to mind all that I have told you." The Holy Spirit did not inspire these apostles in a vacuum, without their first experiencing history the way everyone else does, nor without their prior knowledge of history, especially Biblical history. Indeed not! For as Peter and John explain, their inspiration enabled them to understand and announce what they had already witnessed: the common events of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. These were the previous historical things they had seen and heard (Acts 2:32; 4:24). Their inspiration was inextricably tied to history with all its

ambiguities. (Acts 1:21-22)

[The final page of III is missing from the manuscript.]

IV

May the Holy Spirit,  
Whom the Father sends in Jesus' name,  
Bring these words to your remembrance:

“ANYONE WHO LOVES ME WILL HEED WHAT I SAY. . . . HE WHO DOES NOT LOVE ME DOES NOT HEED WHAT I SAY.” (John 14:23-24)

A moment ago we said that the inspiring by the Holy Spirit dare not be separated from the facts of history. The converse is also true: the facts of biblical history cannot be understood without the Holy Spirit. Without Him to teach us, we might still retain all sorts of facts, but not as Gospel facts, hence not the facts of Scripture. We do run the danger of forgetting that. We tend to reduce the things which happened in biblical history – for example, Jesus' virgin birth or His resurrection or the Exodus – reduce them to where we can no longer see what really was happening there “for us men and for our salvation.” All we have left then is the fact that this or that miracle took place. That much many a pagan believes. So do the devils. Once we have stripped these facts of their real Gospel secret, what good does it do to ask, “Do you believe that they happened or don't you?” Of course they happened. But that does not require believing in any evangelical sense of faith. So the first question is not, “Did it happen or didn't it?” No, the first question is, “Did WHAT happen?” For example, what really happened when Jesus was born of a virgin? Or when he suffered, died and was buried? What does it mean when the Large Catechism says, “All this in order to become my Lord”? (The Creed, 31) Only as we first answer that question, discerning the Lordship of Jesus in and through those events, do we thereby answer the other question (“Did it

happen?") in a way that really honors our Lord. That is possible only by faith in Christ, out of love for Him. For as Jesus says, in order to "heed what I say" it is necessary first to "love me." And that is why He sends the Holy Spirit.

"He who does not love Me," says our Lord, "does not heed what I say," even though that man may SEEM to get the biblical facts straight. He really does not get the facts straight, not even the simplest facts, not even those facts which seem hardly miraculous at all. For he does not understand what really happened.

It was that way with the disciples. For, as Jesus said, it was because they did not love Him that they could not grasp what in fact was happening. Even the elementary event of Jesus' death, His "going away," the disciples misunderstood. True, if someone had asked them whether His dying happened or not, they would of course have answered that it did. And in a sense they were right. He did die. But what they would have meant by His dying was all wrong. The dying which they thought was happening never really happened at all. They were too afraid, too unloving, too dispirited to see that WHERE Jesus was going was home and that the One to WHOM He was going was His own Father. So what point would there have been in asking the disciples before they received the Spirit, "Did Jesus' death happen or not?" No, the question which needed to be answered first is, "Did WHAT happen?" "Which death?" The death they originally had in mind did not really occur.

We all want to heed our Lord's Word. That too is something which we in our Synod all have in common. We all want to believe what His Word says to us, truly believe it. None of us wants to deny or even to abridge what all was happening in the biblical history. All of us yearn to perceive how those wondrous happenings, each and every one of them, are bound inextricably

to what God was there doing for our judgment and salvation. We all know that without that “for us” no event in Scripture is yet a subject for faith, an acting out of Jesus’ Lordship. What we are also finding out to our sorrow is that this constant connection between biblical history and biblical Gospel can be treacherously difficult to discern in each and every case. No wonder, such discerning is humanly impossible without our being taught by the Holy Spirit. This difficulty of ours, perhaps more than any other in our whole theological task, reflects how remiss we have been in doing our biblical homework. All of us have. Now it comes home to us how utterly dependent we are, for our reading of the Scriptures, upon the love of Christ and the leading of His Spirit.

V

May the Holy Spirit,  
Whom the Father sends in Jesus’ name,  
Bring these words to your remembrance:

“THIS IS WHAT THE PROPHET SPOKE OF.” (Acts 2:16)

Peter’s sermon at Pentecost heralds the dawning of the new day promised throughout the Old Testament. The new was promised in the old. What is it that is new? According to Peter the new is Jesus and His resurrection. And he quotes an old promise of new life from Psalm 16 to make his point (Acts 2:25-28). The raising of Christ the crucified is the fulfillment of that promise. Peter’s preaching was initiated by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the gathered community with signs of fiery tongues and the sound as of a rushing wind. The spirited community began speaking with tongues. And that event too, as Peter reminded the crowd, had also been promised. For the prophet Joel had seen that day coming, a day of promises fulfilled for people far and near, even for those who were far from the Law and far from acceptable. That day the promise was fulfilled for “every one

whom the Lord our God may call.” (Acts 2:39) We may not all agree precisely on how all of the old relates to the new or just how each of these ancient promises were understood by the Israelites. But this we have in common, that we affirm the old is fulfilled by the design of God in Jesus Christ, whom God has made both Lord and Christ.

The Old Testament is God’s prophetic and promising Word. That Word is far more than predictive. If we treated the Old Testament only as a book of predictions, a collection of accurate information regarding coming events, we would have discerned no difference between the efforts of Old Testament prophets and the attempts of pagan diviners to tell fortunes and predict distant fulfillments. What makes the prophets different? What makes them spokesmen of our God? The fact that their prophecies were true? More than that! What exactly did the prophets declare? In a word, “the promise!” A “promise to you and to your children and to all who are far away.” (Acts 2:38)

The prophets spoke as “men of faith” who had experienced God’s great acts of redemption in history: the exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the gift of the covenant, the presence of the Lord with power and blessing in their midst. They believed in Him and they spoke, addressing Israel in the crises of her history. The words of promise they spoke from the Lord were, not negated by persistent unbelief, nor erased by repeated disappointments nor exhausted by timely fulfillments in the people and events of the Old Testament era. Far from it. These promises opened the way to a new and more glorious future. They were power surging through history, as the Holy Spirit led men of God to announce even greater comings of their Lord. They kept driving forward to Jesus Christ, the center of all history and all promise. The core, the climax and the seal of all Old Testament promises is Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected, proclaimed among all nations. Thus it is that the New Testament

fulfills and interprets the Old Testament. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, on the one hand, and the universal proclamation of His Name, on the other, together constitute the fulfillment of Old Testament promise (Luke 24:47). Without the newness of Jesus the Messiah and the proclamation of life in His name the Old Testament is both incomplete and obscure.

We appeal to you, and to all, to remember how much and what great things we have in common as God's new people brought into being in these last times, redeemed in Jesus Christ, and sent with Good News. Let's avoid fretting about prophecy in such a way that the entire Christological question is in danger of being sidetracked. Let us not be so preoccupied with the predictive accuracy of the prophets or the historical methods we employ to analyze their writings that we lose sight of the promise they proclaim. But let us unite in praising God for His prophets, His providence, His promise for His beleaguered people of old and now again in these new times of His Son.

VI

May the Holy Spirit,  
Whom the Father sends in Jesus' name,  
Bring these words to your remembrance:

"THE WORLD MUST BE SHOWN." (John 14:31)

The Father sends the Spirit through the Son, and the Spirit inspires the church for its mission of confessing Him before the world. This mission is not optional. Jesus departed and the Spirit came because "the world must be shown" (John 14:31), shown the love Jesus has for the Father and the love the Father has for the world in Jesus. "The full extent of His love" (John 13:1) has been shown to us and to the world in the cross. That love, like every gift of God, is given to be shared. It is the joyous task of the church to move out into all the world with

works and words that show the love of Jesus. Unfortunately the perennial tendency of God's people is to hoard the Gospel rather than share it, a tendency reinforced by the current controversy in our Synod. It is so easy, we confess, to become preoccupied with theological questions and theological conflict and to lose sight of the mission to which all of us are called. We appeal to you and to all to turn from conflict to confession. Let us together remember that the church has been entrusted with the Gospel – not merely to protect and preserve it, not only to elaborate and polish it, not to boast of having it, nor to contemplate and fondle it nor to argue over it. The church has been inspired for a mission of confessing the Gospel.

The “holy inspiration” for which we prayed in the collect on Rogate Sunday has been a fact of life since the miracle of Pentecost. For the Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, inspired us to believe in Jesus as our Lord, kept us in the true faith and motivated us to share the Gospel of the crucified Christ. He is the true treasure of the church that God's Word imparts to us (LARGE CATECHISM, Baptism 37).

We are called as His people to testify to “the great things God has done” (Acts 2:11). We are summoned to our mission by our Lord who calls us His witnesses (Acts 1:8). All our testimony and all our teaching must ultimately point to Him. Thus we are commissioned to bear witness, not to a specific set of carefully formulated doctrines nor to the Bible for its own sake, but to the Gospel, to Jesus Christ as the real and living way to the Father. God's people are summoned to address the Gospel to the whole human being and to the whole society throughout the world. You are sent as commissioned men on that mission.

The Spirit in the church is the Spirit of bold, prophetic testimony to Jesus Christ. And so in the power of that Spirit

the church goes "to the ends of the earth" (1:8) speaking the Gospel message and translating it into action so that the Word becomes flesh and so that deeds are not mute. For the Good Word is "to you and to your children and to all that are far away" (Acts 2:39), as far away as the gentile world or the valley of the shadow of death. As the church proclaims that Gospel and lives by its power the world will be shown what it needs to know.

## VII

May the Holy Spirit,  
Whom the Father sends in Jesus' name,  
Bring these words to your remembrance:

"PEACE IS MY PARTING GIFT TO YOU." (John 14:27)

As we your teachers and now your colleagues bid you farewell, we wish you the Lord's peace. What kind of peace? "My own peace," Jesus calls it, "such as the world cannot give." This peace is His because He gives it, but more than that, he achieved it. "Peace" is that great prize for which he did battle with the world and which He now bestows upon His people. We welcome you as fellow theologians to the lifelong task of interpreting His peace and of distinguishing it from the world's peace. We your colleagues in the ministry of the Gospel of peace appeal to you and to all our brothers in our Synod to remember that we are called of God to struggle not against each other but against the world for the sake of the world. Does any one of us really need to be reminded that the world is present also even in our own hearts and lives? We have the world in common, and better than that. We – you and we and all God's people – have the Lord's own peace established and strong in our hearts.

His peace has the shape of the cross. the Father did not bestow it as a direct celestial infusion straight out of heaven into

all believers. He gave it in and through the Word made flesh, in Jesus born of a Jewish mother, in Jesus crucified on Golgotha, in Jesus opposed by the powers of darkness who could not overcome Him, in Jesus whom God raised on the third day. Through these great acts the peace of God was won, the unworldly peace the world needed. Note that this peace is "unworldly" not "otherworldly." It is not an escape from the world any more than His gaining of that peace was a flight from the world and its evil power. And now he gives us that peace as we struggle where the world is most worldly, and where the Gospel is under attack. He gives it to us who, as He Himself was, are burdened with specific historical and worldly burdens. There will be days when you are tempted to complain, "Why can't we be your people and enjoy your peace without all these extras, all these historical burdens? It is heavy enough, Lord, being a Christian, but why Missouri Synod Lutheran? Why must I be caught in this controversy about the priority of the Gospel?" It may even seem like mockery to hear someone greet you and say, "The peace of the Lord be with you."

Yet that is precisely the word that we who are besieged by the world need to hear. He has won the peace and bestows it freely on His own. While His Gospel is under attack we need to speak that message of peace to the attackers and to ourselves. With the enemy at the gates he says, "Set your troubled hearts at rest and banish your fears." Easier said than done? But it has been done! How? By His "going away." For His going away was not only to death but to a victorious reunion with the Father. And more than that, He promises "I am going away and coming back to you." Peace is His "coming back" to you! And this time He brings the Father along. Both of them have come to dwell with us in peace.

Being His people, being the place of His dwelling and being identified with His Gospel will inevitably mean conflict with

the world. But it will also mean a rich measure of His peace. That is His promise. Being Lutherans in the current debate over the nature and function of the Gospel makes that conflict even sharper. But as theologians in that struggle we wish you His peace and more. We pray that a double measure of His Spirit may be yours so that you discern ever more clearly how all questions of life and faith in our church and our ministry must be posed anew and reconsidered in the light of the priority of the Gospel. In that work we are one, for the Gospel has made us one. The Gospel is our agenda!

As we undertake this mission we bear our burdens and we bear with our brothers, remembering that our brothers also bear with us, and that Christ bears us all. Thus it is that as we bid you farewell we offer you this parting peace, which is His peace. And we speak that word with you as we have spoken it with each other at every campus communion, "Peace, Brothers!"

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# The Theology of Helmut Thielicke

Colleagues,

Some of you know that Helmut Thielicke was my "Doktor-vater" (=major mentor for the degree) at the University of Hamburg 50 years ago. Although Marie and I have now moved into our "old folks home" (Hidden Lake!), we're still downsizing what we didn't get downsized at the old place. Mostly filing cabinets. One batch of file folders that showed up carries the label "Helmut Thielicke." And in that batch I found my (completely

forgotten) presentation from 1969 on Thielicke. I also no longer remember who the intended audience was. Ergo, now in 2011–42 years later—you are! Here it is.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **Introduction to the Theology of Helmut Thielicke**

Helmut Thielicke is 61 years old. [He died at age 77 in March 1986.] Thus he was in his early twenties when Hitler came to power in his native Germany. Like many other theologians of Germany between the two world wars, his magnificent obsession was focused on proclamation, on connecting the Christian message with the obviously different “modern” man of the 20th century. This is clearly reflected in his writing and speaking career, especially in his preaching for the past 15 years to SRO audiences in Hamburg’s St. Michael’s [today’s saint!] church with its 3000 seats.

Thielicke’s two major works written while he was still in his twenties addressed themselves to the problem of history (Geschichte und Existenz—history and existence) and to the impact of the Enlightenment (Vernunft und Offenbarung—reason and revelation) in shaping modern man. This latter work was an investigation of Lessing’s philosophy of religion. In many of Thielicke’s subsequent works Lessing is a central figure. He is paradigmatic for the modern mind. He raises the question of authority. The truths of reason come with their own self-confirmation; but the historical truths of Christian revelation are not so, or at least are no longer so. These historical truths (God’s actions with Israel, the words and works of Jesus) are conveyed to us via historical reports. The events may well have had convincing power for the people present at the time,

who experienced them existentially, so to speak, but they do not have convincing power for me today when all I have is a report of the power event. Thus Lessing concludes, speaking for every post-enlightenment man: Historical truths can never have the convincing power that truths of reason have.

Lessing is willing to be “convinced” of the truth of Christian proclamation, to bow to it if he can do so with integrity, i.e., without surrendering his own existence and freedom. But such obedience is possible only at the court competent in matters of conviction, namely, the court of reason and conscience. Any obedience which bypasses this court violates the authority of God (Lessing had no trouble being a theist. It was the particularities of Christian revelation that gave him trouble.) and violates the existence of the human self, and is thus unworthy of credence.

Thielicke deciphers in Lessing’s book, *Education of the Human Race* (*Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*), a valid insight into the movement of human history. Historical evolution does produce new forms of human self-consciousness. The Enlightenment was such a qualitative (and not merely quantitative) shift. As Lessing portrays it, it is the movement of the human race from the realm of myth and revelation to the age of reason characteristic of the unfolding enlightenment era. As God accommodated himself in the past to the mythic self-consciousness of man, he is to be expected to accommodate himself to the non-mythic rational self-consciousness of the man of the Enlightenment. But that makes the problem of preaching even more acute. How can the word of God be proclaimed as an event that confronts us from the outside, when the possibility exists for man to produce its effects himself (be a moral man, responsible, loving, etc.), even if he initially needed some sort of revelation to catalyze him into producing his own religion?

In Thielicke's later works another key figure moves in to share the limelight with Lessing in the shift of the self-awareness of modern man. That figure is Descartes. Descartes' famed motto: cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am), places the thinking subject in the center of the stage. In Thielicke's dogmatics (Vol. I, 1968) he shows how the Cartesian concern for the thinking subject has shaped western life and thought since that time and that it cannot be rolled back. No Christian understanding of history should ever try to do so. The Cartesian shift from knowledge of truth "out there" in the known object to knowledge of the knower (the subject of the knowing act) has brought about the following consequences for Christian proclamation and theology. It has led theologians to concentrate on the act of man's understanding and his appropriating the Christian message. From Schleiermacher in the 19th century to Bultmann and Tillich and the secular theologians of the twentieth, this concern has dominated the theological market place. It thinks of man as one "come of age," emancipated from old "alien" authorities for his knowledge and convictions, and opens its conversation with this man in typical Cartesian fashion, viz., by engaging him in an analysis of his own existence. When such theology seeks to get its Christian message across to this man, it finds itself compelled to wrestle with the knotty problems of hermeneutics, the how-question of interpreting the Christian message so that it will be understood and appropriated by this Cartesian man.

Thielicke is critical of this way of doing theology and preaching in the face of modern Cartesian man. He insists that he registers this criticism not because he is a conservative and the Cartesian theological types are too radical, but because the Christian message itself suggests something else is going on when God's creative word encounters a man, ANY man pre- or post-Cartesian. Here is how he specifies the non-Cartesian theology

even when it is addressed to modern Cartesian men:

**“The content of the proclamation is God’s spirit-filled creative action-word (Tatwort), which does not merely open itself up to the hearer, but rather creates its own hearer, as it produces in him an ‘Existence-in-the-Truth’ (Sein in der Wahrheit) (John 18:37). Thus it is this proclamation, pregnant with this content, and not the theology that grows out of it, which constitutes the medium of the Spirit and his creative working. Theology is one sort of reaction flowing from one whose existence has been struck by that word. It describes reflexively the grounds and content of the certainty that has been thus appropriated, ALREADY appropriated.”**

Thielicke would not say that proclamation can ignore the current self-awareness(es) of man, but that proclamation is not intent on having this man appropriate the message with the self-awareness he brings. For the Christian message alerts the proclaimer himself to the awareness that whatever the self-awareness of modern man may be, he, the proclaimer, anticipates that it will be the self-awareness of a sinner, regardless of the form (mythic, rational, secular) that this self-awareness takes.

“Thus we point out in the name of a non-Cartesian theology that God’s word is not at all appropriated by the given status of a man’s existence. For the Word recreates, via the Spirit’s wonder-working, the old creature and thus achieves with its own resources the conditions under which it is heard and accepted. It is Action-word. We do not pull God and his word into our existence; rather we encounter ourselves in the process of rebirth and are drawn into God’s history. Here our self is not (as in Cartesian theology) an identity within which nothing more than variations of our self-awareness occur. Instead this

identity of the self can only be grasped dialectically: I live, and yet it is not I, but Christ lives in me.”

The word of God (revelation), the man of faith (Sein in der Wahrheit), and the current shape of man at this point in history in his world (man and the world between the fall into sin and judgment day) – these are the three base points for Thielicke as he does his theology and preaching. As specified above, the distinction between theology and preaching are not to be drawn categorically, but mutually interactively. For ultimately both are in the service of the same Lord, in two different modes of servanthood.

These three base points are clearly seen in the huge four-volume ethics (3000-plus pages) Thielicke has completed – curiously enough done before his dogmatics, reversing the tradition of the entire fraternity of German systematic theologians.

Thielicke says that he started with ethics first because the times called out for it. The times called out for a doctrine of man and of the world. Thus for Thielicke the theme of Christian ethics is really Christian anthropology: Man and his being-in-the-world.

What follows is a condensation of his preface to the American edition of the ethics: “I did not want to write a book of morals, what the Christian must DO. That kind of legalism conflicts with the Gospel and the Reformation heritage of man’s freedom when liberated by Christ. Liberation means that the Christian man now may do what previously he could not. He does not stand under a MUST when he stands under Christ’s Lordship. But he does inquire concerning the will of that Lord for this his servant in this and that life situation. What he does is not a matter of indifference.

“Life lived out under the eyes and will of the Lord becomes a

problem because of the reality in which that life has to be lived out. That reality limits and restricts me. I find reality already in operation with structures that seem to force my action into fixed channels. Take the business man, for example. In private life it is not too hard to perceive what I am to do in loving my neighbor when that neighbor is my spouse or my personal acquaintance. But what about the neighbor who is my business competitor? The structure of the economic world and its 'own indigenous laws-of-operation' [Eigengesetzlichkeit in German] contradict the rule of love which says consider only the neighbor's interest and not your own. Quite obviously the autonomy (Eigengesetzlichkeit) of business life has to be taken into account here. I will not be in business tomorrow if I sacrifice my all for my competitor today. So just what it would mean to be a loving business competitor will not be determined easily.

"Even if this example is overdrawn, it makes clear what I consider the true problem of ethics, viz., that man with his existence is integrated into reality structures (often operating with their own Eigengesetzlichkeit) and that he has to work with these structures in his daily work and decisions. It is in the multi-faceted realm of the whole of reality (occupational, political, familial, social, economic life) where most people experience their real problems of conscience, their conflicts and personal difficulties.

"A book proposing to be theological ethics must do more than analyze these structures in terms of their own intrinsic Eigengesetzlichkeit. Theological ethics asks about the relation of these structures to God, and therewith to man as the creature of God. Reformation theology, which labeled these structures as "orders of creation," did not develop the notion well enough to avoid distortion and mis-meaning. At least some strands of Reformation theology see these structures as permanent, given

from the very first day of the creation. The fact of the world's fallenness and man's Babylonian heart (the heart depicted in the Tower of Babel episode) [N.B., whenever Thielicke uses the word Babylonian, he's using it as it sounds in German, which recalls the Tower of Babel and not the ancient empire of Babylonia) are ignored by such a notion of the orders. The accent which I seek to add is to see the orders as God's work in the creation in view of the fall and man's Babylonian character. My preferred term is Notverordnungen (emergency ordinances) revealed in the so-called Noachic covenant, God's commitment to Noah after the flood, instituting such structures as would preserve the already fallen creation from total annihilation. The Tower of Babel pericope is a word of God that depicts the functional procedures of "normal" man after the fall, and the necessity of such emergency measures for man's own welfare and that of the fallen world as well. It also illuminated Babylonian man participating in shaping the structures of his own given world.

"I consider the doctrine of justification which Luther re-discovered to be in fact the heart of theology. But just as in the heart of the individual believer this justified heart must now pump its blood into all the extremities of the believer's life (home, business, politics, etc.); so also this heart must pump blood into all segments of Christian theology. I seek to do this in the realm of ethics. What are the implications of justification by grace alone, freedom from the dominion of the Law, and the polarity of sin and grace for the existence of social intercourse, economic competition, labor-management relations, etc.? If the blood is not pumped out to these areas, Christians are in danger of succumbing to schizophrenia – in private life a believer living, as it were, supernaturally in a kind of superworld, but as a man of the world following the laws of the world.

"My aim in this interpretation of reality is to liberate

Christian consciousness from this cleavage and to establish its unity. And not only Christians, but other thoughtful and reflective men as well. It is my intention to address this non-Christian audience by showing that the Christian message is not discussing issues in some other world, but in the real world in which the man of our age lives out his life. The word of God and faith as existence-in-the-truth speaks of the issues that are common to every man – life and death, marriage and the state, society and economics. The man of the world when alerted to this fact is forced to concede, 'Here is someone speaking about my problems, about me; I must listen to what he has to say.'

"But this brings us back to the intersection of theology and preaching.

What is to be preached is the word of God, God's revelation. Yet that revelation is about the life of man in the world, in the web of the *Eigengesetzlichkeiten*, in the specific shape of his post-Cartesian self-consciousness. Our preaching is to interpret the world of man, and therewith lay bare the theme which is of concern both to Christians and to secular men. Only thus can our message acquire a new worldliness. Only thus can there be a new incarnation of the Word which seeks out man in his earthly relationships.

"By showing how close Christian ethics is to Christian preaching I hope to have shown that ethics is not secondary, not the dessert after the main course. Christian faith is always the faith of living men, men who stand in the reality of this world and are subject to its constant pressures. The believer cannot believe 'in' God without believing 'against' the reality in which he finds himself, that reality which seems to be opposed to God and in face of which he must struggle through to the great 'nevertheless' of faith. For the demands which come from many of the orders of man's daily life are such that he 'falls'

precisely in fulfilling them. They draw him into disobeying God precisely by his giving himself to them, because they come to stand BETWEEN him and God. It may also be that several mandates individually contradict one another, so that the believer is involved in a conflict of values. For, after all, he lives out his faith precisely in this aeon between the fall and judgment day, in this world which is no longer whole, no longer transparent for God.

“Because this is so, the form of faith’s obedience in this aeon will seldom, if ever, be clear-cut and unequivocal. If one claims the opposite, he is only giving a variation of that righteousness by the Law which feeds on the illusion that man is capable of satisfying the claim of God. At the very point where obedience reaches its limit (e.g., when the crisis of conflicting mandates arises – ‘damned if I do, and damned if I don’t’), there the question of forgiveness arises and one moves beyond the question of how to be obedient in the crisis situation. For this crisis is an impasse which shows us that the reality of this aeon, like our own Babylonian heart, can of itself produce no real righteousness. Hence there arises at this point the awareness that all our action stands in need of such forgiveness. Thus dogmatics and ethics are essentially saying the very same thing about one and the same theme. They have a common root in the doctrine of justification.”

Consequently Thielicke begins his ethics with an extended treatment of the “dogmatic” theme: justification. As the previous paragraph already hints, he anticipates that the discussion of any ethical issue, if that discussion builds on the three base points (revelation, faith, concrete reality of the actual situation), will eventuate in more than enlightened obedience. It will see this particular issue as a MODEL, a paradigm, of human existence between the fall and the judgment day, where the Eigengesetzlichkeit of the world’s structures are

operational, where man's Babylonian heart functions in ever new variations (Cartesian, non-Cartesian, and umpteen more possible variations as history continues to evolve), where even the man with the best of intentions and best of insight needs the word of forgiveness. He does not want to slip into a legalism which says that in such-and-such a situation, this is what a man of faith must do. Nor does he wish to spell out general principles and let each make his own application. The models are not illustrations of some general ethical principles Thielicke would try to get across. He says: "The function of these models is the substantive one of displaying in concrete detail the whole complicated web of reality, and of thus averting the danger that ethics will simply propound normative principles under which the individual cases are then presumably to be subsumed. Seldom if ever does a case from real life conform to any classical model of this or that ethical problem. Each case is its own complicated web of reality.

"The hardest thing about ethical decision is usually not to muster up a readiness for obedience, but to decide what is in fact demanded, or in Christian terms, what the will of God IS in this specific case. For the norms are not usually so clear-cut and unambiguous – this points us to the theological background – that we can subsume this concrete case under them. On the contrary, they usually confront us as part of the web of conflicting norms among which we have to choose.

"Thus in my ethics the conflict situations, which other works on ethics often treat on the margins, are put at the center. The central ethical question: 'What ought I do?' can be dealt with only if a concrete but representative part of reality is analyzed in such detail as to make clear the complicated web of conflict. In my book these detailed analyses are then incorporated in turn into a theoretical systematic scheme. This conjoining of deductive and inductive methods is intended to

prevent the ethics from falling apart aphoristically into a discontinuous series of individual cases, and also to assure that it will not become a mere system of hypothetical cases far removed from reality.

“In no sense does my ethics book tell one what to do in situation ‘x’. In the first place, the intention is to elicit individual decision, not to anticipate it but to provide, as it were, the materials for making it. Secondly, the aim is to shatter the illusion that there is an unequivocally ‘correct’ form of action which can be clearly delineated, as if there were such a thing as ‘RIGHTeousness.’ Attention is drawn instead to the form of the world in this aeon between fall and the judgment, which of itself cannot effect a fulfillment of the will of God in the sense of legal righteousness, and to the fact that the Sermon on the Mount is right when it eschatologically calls in question this world of ours. This points to the cosmological horizon of ethics, though not in the sense that the world becomes a constricting destiny of undeserved frictions in which I am ‘stuck’ as an innocent victim, made guilty against my will. On the contrary, that world which cannot of itself produce righteousness is ‘my’ world; it is the objectification of my own Babylonian heart. That sentence has momentous consequences for theology’s analysis of reality, especially for the examination of the orders and their Eigengesetzlichkeit.”

To conclude: Thielicke not only uses models in his analysis of reality, but also enjoys using models at the other two base points (revelation and the man of faith). We have already heard him allude many times to the Babylonian heart of man which he sees exposed in model-form in the story of the Tower of Babel in the Old Testament. This model illuminates how fallen man in creating his world (its culture, its institutions, its “city-planning”) is engaged in objectifying on the outside the interiority of his own Babylonian heart – both its greatness and

its fateful flaw.

A favored model for both God's revelation and the man of faith in Thielicke's theology is the parable of the prodigal son. The key here is the Father's forgiveness for a son absolutely undeserving of forgiveness. The son's reception of that forgiveness moves him out of the alienation of the far country into the "truth-full" existence (Sein in der Wahrheit) of life in the Father's household. The older brother becomes a classic model of the Babylonian heart that refuses to live by forgiveness. In a sense he is still in the father's household, still even designated son by that father, but he is not transplanted by forgiveness into the "Sein in der Wahrheit." Thus the man of faith is no great hero; nor is the man of unfaith a patent "louse." The father patiently is awaiting both. In Jesus Christ he has concretized his loving Fatherly heart in the very midst of men with their Babylonian hearts and their Babylonian world, communicating in person: I am FOR you, not AGAINST you. It is possible to be in daily contact with God – like the elder brother with the father in the parable – and still be more lost than the hell-raiser is. But the hell-raiser as well as the "good-boy" brother are still lost in the Babel of the far country until they come home into the forgiveness of the waiting Father. Living with that forgiveness, the true son goes out for daily work in the complicated world, that is indeed his FATHER'S WORLD.

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## **Christian Spirituality in the**

# Workplace

Colleagues,

Every now and then I'm asked to do a book review for *MISSIOLOGY*, the journal of the American Society of Missiology, where I've been a member for decades. This time the book offered me for review sounded like the ancient mantra of the Crossings Community, Inc. formulated by our ancestor Bob Bertram: "Crossing Daily Life with the Word of God." So I said yes. Here's what I'll be sending in to the book review editor.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **Taking Your Soul to Work. Overcoming the Nine Deadly Sins of the Workplace**

**By R. Paul Stevens & Alvin Ung**

**Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2010. x.200 pp. paper. \$15.00**

Stevens (Canadian) and Ung (Malaysian), once teacher and student, respectively, at Regent College (Vancouver B.C.) team up to offer a handbook for being consciously Christian while engaged in daily work. Taking your soul to work, as they put it, "a spirituality of work."

Granting that spirituality means many things to many people, they opt for this notion: "a disciplined attempt to align ourselves and our environment with God and to be a concrete bodily expression of God's Spirit in the world through all the effort (paid and unpaid) we exert to make the world a better place, a little closer to the way God would have things."

The format is a three-step process. First a brief chapter on each of the “nine deadly sins” that infect the workplace, better said, infect workers in the workplace and generate “soul-sapping struggles.” Then Part Two, “cultivating” the nine “fruits of the Spirit,” God’s gifts for coping with those soul-sappers. And finally Part Three, “imagining the outcomes of a Spirit-led life” on the same turf where the soul-sappers still ply their trade.

Each of the nine chapters in each of the three sections begins with a dialog between the authors. In part one that dialog highlights the nitty-gritty of the workplace where a specific one of the sins surfaces. They call this a diagnostic dialog. In Part Two their dialog introduces the gift-of-the-spirit for coping with that particular sin. You might call this the God-given therapy for healing that sin’s onslaught. And their final dialog relative to that particular sin “imagines” (their term) the outcome. Throughout all three steps, also in the “imagining,” both authors are speaking from years of experience, Ung from a number of high-profile jobs in Asia—financial analyst, AP foreign correspondent, telecommunications manager, executive in a Malaysian investment firm—and Stevens from a life that includes pastor, carpenter, business person and marketplace theology professor at Regent College.

I wasn’t very far into the book before my Lutheran sensibilities picked up the “evangelical” slant of the authors as they set about to propose this Christian “spirituality of the workplace,” and noticed the differences between their heritage and my own. Wasn’t that already present in their definition of spirituality? Namely, in the univocal understanding of God’s word and work in the world which they proposed, in contrast to the Lutheran Aha! about God’s ambidextrous dealings, bi-vocal speaking, in the world—and the Biblical testimony thereunto.

I too am not a total novice in theology of the workplace. For 30 years I've been involved with the Crossings Community, whose mission is to link "The Word of God to Daily Work." During one early decade of that involvement some 4 to 5 thousand Christians joined us—in some 200 weekend workshops and dozens of semester-long courses at home and abroad—to work on linking the word of God to the daily work of all of us.

What we came up with after that decade has parallels, yet significant differences, I think, from what Stevens and Ung are proposing.

These observations from what I noticed in the book.

1. They say early on (p. 3) "We are followers of Jesus Christ." But then—on the very next pages, as they spell out their "spirituality of work," that name never appears. All the references are to "God." I counted. After that solitary reference to Jesus Christ, all references to the deity—over 40 times—are with the word "God" in the chapter's seven pages. Theism and christocentric theism are not the same thing. Ask any believing Jew, any devout Muslim.
2. The nine sins of the workplace – they added two (restlessness and boredom) to the ancient list of the seven deadly sins (pride, lust, greed, gluttony, anger, sloth, envy) – are behavioral sins. Bad things people do to others and to themselves. Once or twice in the book the deeper notion of sin surfaces, the "root" sin of not fearing and trusting God. But overcoming THAT root sin gets no explicit attention. It's always sins (plural), not THE root sin (singular) that bears the fruits, sins (plural).. The nine sins under discussion are symptoms, the fruits, of the root sin. To focus on healing the bad fruit without attending to the bad root doesn't cure the

malady. Symptom-therapy heals no one. Didn't Jesus make that point repeatedly with his critics throughout the gospels?

3. Jesus is not absent throughout the book, but it is almost always Jesus modeling the godly life. Though his saving work is constantly presupposed, the necessity of having the crucified and risen Messiah present—and active—with us at the workplace is never mentioned. Sensing God's presence there is what counts. Where Jesus comes in for daily work, he is ethical example, behavioral coach.

For example, when it comes to the Fruit of the Spirit "Gentleness," the antidote for the sin "Anger," here is what Jesus does. "The entire life of Jesus embodies gentleness. He is our role model for becoming gentle souls in the workplace." (p.95) That formula is repeated regularly when each of the fruits of the Spirit is called upon to cope with its corollary deadly workplace sin. Here is the full list: pride/joy, greed/goodness, lust/love, gluttony/self-control, anger/gentleness, sloth/faithfulness, envy/kindness, restlessness/patience, boredom/peace.

It's not that the authors are "soft" on Christ's redemptive work. It is that they make no use of it in the work-place spirituality they construct. Is it also significant (even strange for evangelicals?) that most of the Christian writers they cite as theological allies come from Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox venues. The theology of the Protestant reformers—Luther, Calvin, Wesley—is never called upon for support. How come?

One final note. In our years with the Crossings Community we learned that the primal onslaught confronting Christians in the workplace was not losing their morals in the nitty-gritty of daily work, but losing their faith. The struggle for Christians

in the workplace—from CEO to homemaker—was confronting over and over again the voices of the principalities and powers present in the workplace, teasing them to stop trusting Christ’s mercy word for them, and instead hang their hearts on some other “gospel” – either one of euphoria or of despair.

If that is indeed the deepest “soul-sapping struggle in the workplace,” then more is needed than “Jesus is our role model.” We need the crucified and risen Messiah and his “lo, I am with you always” right there on location, where all nine of the workplace-soul-sappers confront us. In Melancthon’s prose at the time of Augsburg (1530), repeated over and over again, “Christus manet mediator.” Not just that Christ once was our mediator, but “Christ [must] remain mediator.” Everywhere and anywhere we are, workplace included.

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## **Risking the Tradition**

Colleagues:

Walter R. Bouman died six years ago this past August. Walt and I were connected for 50 years. We’re on the same Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) graduation photo, class of 1954. We were in cahoots already at the seminary in the tug-of-war about the Bible that was brewing in the Missouri Synod. We were doing doctorates together right after that in Germany—he in Heidelberg with Edmund Schlink, I in Hamburg with Helmut Thielicke. Most significant, he introduced Marie and me to each other, she newly arrived on the seminary library staff (where he was a student part-timer), me his fellow seminarian. His matchmaker mantra: “You’ve both got the same sense of humor. You deserve each

other.” And so it came to pass.

In Germany, with Marie and me married, he still single, we did crazy things together during university vacation breaks. A full week in Beyreuth to take in Wagner’s entire Ring des Niebelungen. A trip in our Volkswagen microbus to pick up his harpsichord at Sperrhake’s instrument factory in Passau. Glacier-gawking in Switzerland. Gruenewald’s altar triptych in Colmar, France – with LeCorbusier’s joltingly modern “Nun’s Hat” chapel nearby. And Salzburg, and Strasbourg, and, and . . . .

And when both of us came home from Germany, each with a dissertation still in progress, I summer-subbed for him in his pastorate at St. Paul’s LC, Chatfield, Minnesota so he could get his done. He reciprocated with analogous goodies. We’ve kept in touch with his widow Jan and she’s given permission for me to pass this along to you. It’s the final chapter of Walt’s first publication, a little book called CHRISTIANITY AMERICAN STYLE. Dayton, Ohio. Geo. A. Pflaum, Publisher. 1970. For the larger story of Walt’s life GO here <http://www.wfn.org/2005/08/msg00195.html>

Peace and Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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First off, a few sentences from the Foreword:

“This book is about institutionalized christianity in America. Through historical analysis of anglo-saxon protestantism, the author shows how these churches have overidentified with American culture. While this identification has built a patriotism and a strong national spirit, it has not allowed religion to play a prophetic role, to criticize political movements, to guide the ambitions of the country.

“Lutheranism and catholicism, on the other hand, since their arrival on this continent, have effectively isolated themselves from the American scene. Separated from cultural movements, they permitted the gospel to grow stale and spend their energies on theological controversies. As a result they are divorced from daily living.

“Such is the state of American christianity. What will its future be?”

Chapter six is Walt’s answer to that question. Written in 1970, it’s 41 years old. But is it really?

Here’s the full table of contents:

1. Crisis in Religion
2. The Protestant Vision
3. The Catholic Experience
4. The Lutheran Enclave
5. The Twentieth Century: Loss of Religious Identity

and then

6. Risking the Tradition  
The survey of religion in America has confronted us with problems and possibilities. Protestants risked intense involvement in American culture; and in the process they lost much of their identity, much of the substance of the christian heritage.

Catholics and lutherans, on the other hand, preserved their identity. They have a heritage rooted in the doctrines, sacraments and structures of the past. However, they paid a price. Neither catholics nor lutherans risked interaction with other christian traditions. Nor did either relate to the dominant American culture. Both groups were concerned with internal problems and their stance was generally defensive, protective. They were

intent on keeping their past intact.

My purpose here is not to pass judgment upon the past. The point is rather, that a defensive and protective stance falls short of christian discipleship and is, in fact, culturally impossible in our present situation. The inadequacy of such a stance is evident from the ministry and teaching of Jesus. He did not come to protect and defend himself, but rather to give himself. "I am among you as one who serves," he said on the eve of his death (Lk. 22:27).

Jesus told a parable (Lk. 19:12-28) about the servant who took his master's money and buried it in the ground because he was afraid of losing it. That which he had been given was taken from him. The faithful servants were those whose discipleship expressed itself in the risk and adventure of encounter. The word to churches with the gift of christian substance is clear. We do not have our tradition in order to preserve it for ourselves. We have it to be risked in servanthood.

The same message comes from our culture and our world. The risk and adventure of encounter are culturally unavoidable today. Christians and churches cannot maintain the security of cultural isolation. Schools and colleges operated by the churches are not able to screen out the world.

Mobile populations alter the old geographical patterns of American religion. Mass communications media penetrate almost every home and mind. Whether there is official ecumenical conversation or not, there are many indications that catholics and lutherans derive their values and attitudes from protestant or secular neighbors rather than

from church teaching.

This kind of cultural interaction is the very essence of the modern era. Although such interaction contains dangers, it also presents opportunities. Have christians really any choice but to engage themselves in their culture?

Shortly after World War II, a bitter young German author, Wolfgang Borchert, wrote a play in which God mumbles to himself, "Nobody pays any attention to me. Nobody cares about me anymore." Finally Beckmann, the everyman of the play, cries out: "Hasn't God studied theology? Who is supposed to care about whom?" We may be living in a world which is uncaring about the church and religion in a variety of ways. But the church is called to care about every man. If we have understood our theology, then we are summoned to care.

How shall we risk our tradition? That has really been my question all along. How shall christians invest themselves in their world? Our path into the twenty-first century is all but impossible to predict. A religious book editor claims that the church of the year 2000 will not be recognizable to anyone of today. If that be true, then we are moving into a future whose shape cannot be guessed from the present. We can, however, examine what we are doing today. The faithfulness with which we live in the present will put any anxieties about the future into perspective (see Mt. 6:33-34).

Ecumenism is a significant part of our present. Anglo-saxon protestants have a relatively long ecumenical experience upon which to build. Lutherans and catholics are newcomers to the ecumenical movement.

Is ecumenism a danger to christian substance? It can be. There is risk, but we have something to risk. We must be discriminating in our ecumenism. The option we have is either to choose to preserve our tradition by avoiding ecumenical encounter or to involve ourselves in the ecumenical movement and lose our tradition. But there is another option open to us. That option becomes evident as we take a closer look at what ecumenism means in the world of today.

The basic feature of the ecumenical climate does not mean an attempt to convert people from one christian denomination to another.

This fact is of enormous significance; it spells the end of suspicion. We no longer need to worry about what sinister motives might lie behind gestures of friendship and cooperation. We no longer have to try to hide our weaknesses and failures from one another. The no-conversion feature of ecumenism indicates respect for one another. The door to honesty as well as charity is open.

Such an ecumenical climate means that we do not have to suppress our differences and our distinctive traditions for fear of renewing old controversies or reopening old wounds. Valid ecumenism involves our commitment to struggle with each other as brothers, to strive with each other in the honest attempt to bring the intrinsic power of our traditions to bear on one another as individuals and as churches. Ecumenism means that we place our different insights, our concerns and even our controversies into the service of one another.

Unless our ecumenism takes tradition seriously, christianity will betray its own nature. It will become

little more than a religious version of the luncheon clubs ostensibly devoted to service. Or, it will use ecumenical cooperation as a thinly disguised effort to form a religious power bloc in order to preserve religion and reassert religious domination over society.

If we struggle with each other in honesty and truth, we will be able to reexamine our traditions. We will be able to assist one another in the reevaluation of our institutions. We will not ask simply how to preserve our institutions. Such a question would mean that we will lose even what we are trying to preserve. Rather, we must ask how our institutions can be expressions of servanthood. "Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it," is a word of Jesus which all four gospels quote (Mk. 8:35 and parallels).

One institution which has been used by Lutherans and Catholics to preserve religion and culture has been the elementary school. The freedom to evaluate the church's whole concept of education should be grasped while it is still an option. Schools of a servant church are not simply agencies for the protection and indoctrination of children in flourishing Catholic or Lutheran parishes; they are agencies which a servant church might well utilize to meet the urgent needs of overcrowded and underfinanced urban educational systems.

The servant church will seek to renew its secondary schools and colleges. They are not for protection and defense either. The insight of Robert Hassinger is appropriate: such institutions are not a teaching arm of the church, but rather an instance of the church learning. The intersection between Christianity and culture can hardly be better cultivated than in an atmosphere where a

vital tradition and a vital world are listening to and learning from each other.

The clergy and the hierarchy of the churches are institutions which are once again being summoned to servanthood. Deep in our traditions we have always known that christian people do not exist for the sake of the clergy. Rather, the clergy are there to equip christian people for the work of ministry (see Eph. 4:11-16). The restiveness of the laity or the conflicts between priests and bishops could become destructive power struggles. They could also be occasions for renewal.

Clergy and hierarchy can be threatened only if the freedom and servanthood of the gospel have been suppressed by fear, by love of power or by defense of privilege. Successors to the apostles are addressed by Christ as were the apostles: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be servant of all" (Mk. 10:42-44).

The christian tradition gives us a basis for encounter with our world, our culture. Christianity is not an ideology seeking imperialistic victories over other ideologies or scrambling to defend itself when it encounters a hostile environment.

The christian tradition of doctrine, sacraments and structure does not exist for its own sake. We are not called to be museum keepers, custodians of the past. Rather, at the center of the christian tradition is the gospel that happened in Jesus for the world. Every facet

of our tradition is a dimension of the good news. St. Mark could summarize Jesus' message with the words, "Repent and believe in the gospel." That is where the power of the christian tradition lies.

REPENT evokes traditional words like SIN and CONFESSION. We have already seen how these words lost their power in American protestantism. The progress which America seemed to be making led to a naive optimism about man. Sin would be eliminated or at least greatly reduced when drunkenness, disease and destitution were vanquished. The kingdom of God would dawn with education and social reform.

REPENTANCE in the sense of becoming a new person was hardly necessary. The course of events indicated how mistaken this was. Corruption and crime did not disappear with prohibition. Exploitation and injustice did not end with the triumph of the labor movement. The war to end war did not end war. Individual problems like marital breakdown, generational friction, vocational anxiety and emotional illness are matched by the magnitude and apparent insolubility of the great social problems: race, war, population, pollution, prison reform, the aged.

All of these problems are finally related to our need for repentance. Here our tradition, if we take it seriously, urges us to probe more deeply. The christian tradition uses the term ORIGINAL SIN to portray the deepest level of the human predicament. Our original sin is really not very original, but radical. For no matter what we have done, no matter how we are oppressing or exploiting or destroying our world, no matter what privileges we enjoy at another's expense, we defend our action or our situation. We justify ourselves. We find scapegoats to blame or excuses to

offer; but we want to think that we are always in the right. We want to protect ourselves, at whatever cost. This is our original sin. This is universal for us as individuals and as institutions. We are defending not just an action, but our very selves. Our identity and our existence depend upon this.

The act of defending reveals our need for self-defense. In fact, this need shows how inescapably religious we are. Where our very self is at stake, there we are practicing our real religion. Whatever we use to defend, protect, excuse or affirm ourselves, that is our god. The gods we make are not God. They cannot defend, excuse, affirm us. Instead we are enslaved by the gods we make. We must serve them, try to blow them up into something they are not. That makes us users, exploiters, destroyers of the people and the things around us.

Our false religions and our false gods are exercises in self-deception and self-destruction. The most enslaving self-justification takes place in the name of God. That is why repentance is not, in the first instance, what we proclaim to the world. Rather, it is what must daily be happening among us in the church. The tragedy of the biblical pharisees was that they falsified religion. They used the laws, the temple, the rituals of God to defend and excuse themselves. They justified themselves at the expense of the outcast and traitors. They did not repent.

The word of Jesus preserved in the tradition is REPENT. Literally that means "get a new mind," another way of saying that we must become different people. "Deny yourselves," said Jesus, which means nothing less than that we give up the self-justifying, excusing, self-defending self, the self propped up by illusory gods. It

means that the self deceiving itself with its own self-created affirmations, the enslaved self which exploits and destroys all around it must be destroyed. We are asked to give up the identity we have created for ourselves. Our SELF is being threatened; Jesus is asking nothing less than that we die; impossible.

But Jesus' word adds, "and believe in the gospel." He is the embodiment of the gospel. That is in our tradition, too. When we confess that Jesus is God, we are recognizing that what happens in him is a happening of God. What he does to people is God's doing. Jesus is God's own YES to those who abandon the affirmations of their own making (II Cor. 1:19). When Jesus meets Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10), he sets him free from his defenses.

Either men believe the gospel or they believe false gospels. that is, either they accept Jesus as God's YES for them and give up their faith in false gospels; or they do not believe Jesus and continue to be enslaved by false gospels. Jesus is the gospel because in his death he triumphs over self-justification by letting it do its worst to him. He is the way God bears the pain of human evil. He breaks the power of the old world with its old enslavement and exploitation. He makes possible a new world with new minds toward one another. He calls us to such daily re-NEW-al by meeting us as the risen one in the liberating sacramental life of the christian community.

Holy baptism is entrance into the cross and resurrection of Jesus, the YES of Jesus to us so that we can be plunged into the death of our self-justifications. The defenses and excuses of the old self do not go away with baptism. They remain. But Christ has placed us into the christian community where the struggle between the old mind and the

new mind goes on. He commits himself to us. Our parents and godparents commit us to the life-long struggle.

The struggle continues in a venerable act of the tradition: confession and absolution. This tradition can easily be routinized with a mechanical recital of petty code violations. But we are then only cheating ourselves. Like the pharisees, we distort the gifts of God for our own self-contrived justification. The shepherding of the confessor is intended to help us uncover our false faith in false gospels. In repentance we can once again give up the old mind in the act of receiving the new mind. Christ himself affirms us in holy absolution. This is the point of ordination.

The freedom from self-justification is always freedom for service. Christ is the gospel because he does not demand that we serve him. Rather, he is our servant. His servanthood frees us from excusing and defending ourselves so that we can commit ourselves to one another. Sin isolates us from one another because as sinners we use and exploit one another. The gospel incorporates us into the community of servanthood.

Salvation in Christ is always corporate. That is why the church is so much a part of the tradition. We celebrate the corporate character of salvation in the meal of the christian community. Christ incorporates us into his body by sharing his self-giving servanthood with us and freeing us for self-giving servanthood in the world. The church happens when the meal of his body and blood happens. From the meal we are sent to corporate servanthood in the world.

The christian community cannot retreat from the problems

and agonies of the world. What the tradition calls original sin illuminates the enslaving power at work in the corporate evils pervading our culture. It helps us recognize the excuses and defenses with which we try to cover up the exploitation and destruction taking place. But one does not have to be a christian to uncover this posturing and self-deception.

The false hopes raised by revolutionaries as well as the false securities promised by reactionaries can be exposed by those who look realistically at the pretense behind the slogans. But without the gospel there is no new mind. There is only cynicism or despair.

One who repents and believes in the gospel can take up the problems day after day because he knows that fullness of joy, final freedom and flourishing humanity are God's desire and promise. He can work on even when he knows that relative solutions will not usher in the final kingdom. They are not the gospel. They do not redeem. But they help to stave off disaster. They contribute to another day's survival. And that's a lot at this point in the world's history.

The tradition does not mean that we abandon this world in favor of the world to come. Instead the tradition frees us to work in this world, to intersect with its culture, heart and soul. That is how we are "faithful in a very little" (Lk. 16:10). Only when we live faithfully in this world can we hear validly the promise of resurrection and everlasting life in a world to come.

There is a lot of religion in America, some of it true, some false; some of it enslaving, some liberating. The bearers of the christian tradition are called to

discriminate, to choose among the religions. That is how we risk the tradition. Unless we do this, we will not experience the power of repentance and faith in the gospel.

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## **Still Missing after 10 Years, the “R” Word: Repentance**

Colleagues,

It's ten years later. The Muslims have not gone away. Nor have more of them become patently more friendly than a few of them were on Nine Eleven. And now a second global disaster confronts us, the bankruptcy of world capitalism. Yes, bankrupt. Webster: “reduced to a state of ruin, broken, sterile, exhausted of valuable qualities.” For everyone to see, except—so it seems—as world leaders, economic and political, try to put humpty-dumpty back together again. Jesus spoke no words of hope for the blind leading the blind. So don't hold your breath.

If God is in the mix—and where is God NOT in the mix, whether trusted or not—then God has to be reckoned with, right? So it says from the first to the last page of the Bible. [Ditto for the Quran!] The God in whom most of us world-capitalists do NOT trust is in the mix here, again smashing the idols. For the bankruptcy of capitalism is the bankruptcy of the de facto “God in whom we trust.” World wide. Global capitalism has become a world-religion right alongside the official ones. Talk about supersession! A world-wide (supposedly non-religious) religion superseding the official ones! What neither Christianity nor

Islam has yet achieved, that ancient deity "Mammon" has achieved: global ecumenism. Like that ancient logo for Sherwin-Williams paint, "It covers the world."

A decade ago a few folks saw in the shattered Twin Towers and Pentagon the two temples of our American religion come tumbling down: money and the military. But few got the message then: Namely, there is no salvation in money or the military. No "Heil." When Germans put Hitler's name after that word two generations ago, they were making a faith-statement: Salvation is in Hitler. Our national faith—and sadly that of much of the rest of the world (how much of it learned from us Americans?)—is "Heil, money! Heil, military!" "In God we trust" is always on our paper money. Never specified is "Which God?" Ay, there's the rub.

That's not just FROGBA, the Folk Religion of God Bless America. It is the new ecumenism of today's regnant world religion. Remember Luther's simple definition of religious faith. Whatever you hang your heart on, that's your religion, that "whatever" is really your God. Irrespective of the deity you may confess when you're at worship.

It's ten years later. Neither the military, nor money, have brought us any "Heil." Nothing is better. Most everything is worse. Just as there was no Heil in Hitler, despite his mesmerizing the German people to hang their hearts on him, there is no Heil in the de facto "world's twin towers," the "M 'n M" of Mammon and Military. They too are mesmerizing in their pseudo offer to bring "Heil" to the world. But who in the public arena is proclaiming that? Even more serious, who in Christian pulpits is proclaiming that? Listen hard when you're in church this Sunday. There is indeed a "famine of the Word of God," that jarring depth diagnosis from the prophet Amos back in his day.

And today, yes this very day, the laundry list of disasters at home and abroad is the drumbeat constantly before us, now with ten times more avenues of communication than we had ten years ago. So close to us are now these communication media that they are “hand-held.” Smarter would be to keep them as far away from us as possible, for who needs to hear of more fires in Texas, floods in Vermont, tornadoes now expanding across venues far way from the old-time “Tornado Alley” of the midwest. Who needs this? WE DO. And we’re surfeiting ourselves with “messaging.” But we still don’t get THE message. “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” That’s straight from Jesus. And perishing there is aplenty—all across the planet.

Marie counsels me to terminate this jeremiad. “Just send out again what you posted 10 years ago. They’re smart enough to put in the new nouns (earthquake in DC—but not in the government, Irene, Texas ablaze, jobs, jobs, jobs) for the ones of 10 years ago. In many cases, they won’t even have to do that.” OK, I’ll do what she tells me. [Would that I’d done that more often. lo, these past 56 years. Btw, We’re in our new retirement-village home, one of the several such communities of the Lutheran Senior Services, St. Louis. Google LSS, if curious. The new specs: 11724 Hidden Lake Drive, #234, St. Louis 63138.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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**Thursday Theology #170 [That’s 521 posts ago! And still a one-string banjo. I ought to retire.]**

**Sept. 13, 2001**

**Topic: Coping with Terror—the Missing “R” Word.**

Colleagues,

It may be too soon to post this to you. Maybe it shouldn't ever be posted at all. I'm not clear on this. So trepidation goes along with this posting.

One "R" word—better, one "re-" word—has been missing in what I've heard from our leaders and media voices about the disasters of Sept. 11 so far. Granted it's only the second day after the cataclysm as I write this. More words and pictures will continue to surfeit us. Maybe the missing "re-" word will surface. To wit, the word "repentance." Even if our public interpreters don't use that "re-" word, we Christians would do well to put it into the public discussion, wouldn't we?

President Bush offers "re-solve" and "re-assurance" as our government goes after those "re-sponsible." Somewhere, we're told, a "re-turn" address will show up to identify the villains. And then "re-prisal, re-tribution" will follow. Lots of "re-" words, but not repentance.

But what if one of the names on that return address is "God?" For me too, that sounds crazy at first. Even worse, cruel, uncaring, supercilious, just awful. But in the Bible, those with ears to hear—seldom ever the majority—did hear God's voice, God's call-to-repentance voice, when all hell broke loose in public life as the walls came tumbling down and the butchers entered the city. See the Amos citation below, as one example.

Seeing God in the equation in no way exonerates the villains. Not at all do they come out "good guys." They are murderers bent on villainy, for which they too will pay, says God. Yet God appropriates them as his agents—using, as Luther occasionally said, one sinner to punish another sinner.

Isaiah 10 is one classic text about this. "Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger.... Against a godless nation [Israel!] I send him, and against the people of my wrath [Israel] I command him." The king

of Assyria, of course, doesn't know that he is God's agent. He thinks he's in charge in his own campaign of world conquest. But the Big Screen shows that he's being used, even as he fills the streets of Jerusalem with blood. The Big Screen also shows that when God's done using him, he will get his own just deserts. "When the Lord has finished all his work on Mt. Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride." The subsequent scenario for Assyria is not pretty. Even so Isaiah calls Israel to repentance.

Is there any help here for us after Tuesday—for our repentance? Yes, but there are barricades between us and that help. Fed, as we Americans are, on the folk piety of "God bless America," (the only God-mention I heard from our elected representatives on day #1), repentance is just not on the agenda. To mention it now sounds subversive, unpatriotic, siding with the enemy. In wartime, that's treason. Even President Bush's Biblical words from Psalm 23 at the close of the first day—though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me—didn't sound much like repentance. The premise for the verse quoted is that THIS Lord really is confessed as "our shepherd." Is that true in any serious sense in our American culture? Would that Bush, evangelical Christian as he is, had cited the classic line from the previous Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why?" Granted, that is a cry of despair, but it does send the right question to the right addressee. And for that question there IS an answer from that addressee: "Why? You have been weighed and found wanting. Ergo, repent." That's not God's entire answer, of course, nor yet a good-news answer, but it starts at the right place.

Repentance, of course, begins with contrition, a "mea culpa" 'fessing up to our wrongness and God's rightness in dealing with us accordingly. That, of course, entails faith in God, trusting

God, as we face up, 'fess up, to his own rightful reprisal. Repentance admits that we have a "God-problem." But where do our public figures ever signal that America has any God-problem? With reference to God, Alfred Newman articulates the faith of America: "What, me worry?"

Worry there is aplenty, sure, but not about God. In our American folk piety it's an automatic given: we can count on God to bless America. God's our buddy. One of you readers calls this the "Rotary Club religion" of America, which all too often, sad to say, comes from Sunday pulpits as well. There's no place for repentance in a theology that says God only blesses America. Repentance is a response to the opposite, God the critic and our encounters with the rod of God's anger.

But could God really be the return address for Tuesday's airline missiles? God sending terrorists to perpetrate massacre? All those innocent people? Thousands of them? If we think only of the terrorists, then the "re-" word retribution is at the top of the list. And we continue to hear it from the head honchos. But if God IS in the mix too, if (ala Isaiah) the terrorists are the "rod of God's anger," then the other "re-" word is the only appropriate one. Even in the face of the chaos that immobilizes us and what we've heard to cope with it.

What we've "heard" is the key. Have we heard God assessing (not blessing) America at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001? None of the first day interpreters I listened to gave any signal that they had heard such a word from God. Perhaps the knee-jerk singing of "God Bless America" by Congress members that first day did signal something. But what? Mega-despair? A mini-prayer? Maxi-bewilderment? But it surely was no clear call for repentance. Even so, if we never find out who the human agents were for the disaster, the divine message need not stay hidden. [Dis-aster, by the way, is an eerie term for

Tuesday. The word means “bad star.” Originally linked, I believe to a bad horoscope. Four bad stars slammed out of the sky on Tuesday.]

But how could the USA possibly be a candidate for God’s judgment, a rogue nation? Granted, other peoples say that. Most likely the agents for Tuesday’s apocalypse say so too. But they’re simply wrong, we say. We are by definition NOT a rogue nation. There are noble explanations for all (well, most all) of our national behavior. For us it’s incomprehensible that we genuinely are candidates for repentance. Unless we get illumination from the Word of God and get the eyes to see and the ears to hear. But that vision, that hearing, doesn’t come from the financial district of Manhattan or the Pentagon. We’ve been getting “other gospels” for a long time from those stations.

Yet how could God pinpoint it more clearly by knocking down those two WTC transmission towers and putting a big hole in the one on the Potomac? The messages coming from those “towers” (is ancient Babel analogous?) are money and military, fundamental “M & M’s” of our national way of life. How can you get to repentance, even hear of repentance, from those loudspeakers? But they are now rubble—and the mega-numbers previously coming from them about our economic and military might are now corpse-counts. Doesn’t that ironically turn them into voices for repentance?

But repentance is tough. Repentance is hard to do even for one person. It’s like dying, says Jesus, like crucifixion. No one in their right mind would do it, unless . . . Unless the alternative were even worse. As it is. But that conviction takes faith. And for that repenters need help so that it becomes a repentance unto life, and not a repentance unto despair. According to the Word of God such help is available.

But how might a nation repent? How national repentance would unfold is hard, well nigh impossible, to imagine. Will any nation, CAN any nation admit to being a rogue nation by God's own evaluation? Luther confronted the question in 1529 as Suleiman the Magnificent with his 600 thousand (sic!) troops stood outside the gates of Vienna that year, having just scorch-earthed their way through the Balkans to this Eastern outpost of Western Christian Europe. Luther called for all of Christian Europe to repent. But realist that he was, he didn't actually expect it would happen, so he proposed a Plan B—vicarious repentance, surrogate repentance, some minimal few doing it and many benefiting. Consequently he encouraged whoever would listen to repent and perhaps God would acknowledge that as the repentance of all. There was Biblical precedent for that—remember Abraham pleading for Sodom. Then too, God had once acknowledged a vicarious “atonement” as good for all, so vicarious “repentance” might work too, also on the scene of world politics.

Luther's 1529 essay was titled “On War against the Turks.” [It gets a bit macabre when you remember that “Turks” meant Muslims in 1529 and then look at today's world scene.] Luther called his readers to realize that there were TWO enemies confronting so-called “Christian” Europe outside the gates of Vienna in 1529. One was Suleiman and his 600K soldiers. The other enemy was God. The two were in cahoots as God was using Suleiman as “the rod of his anger” against the phony Christianity of so-called Christian Europe. Though allies, these two different enemies required two different strategies. The only way to cope when God's the enemy is repentance. Fighting is nonsense, and if done, is guaranteed suicide. Repentance dissolves God's enmity.

Coping with the God-enemy by repentance brings major benefits for confronting the other enemy, said Brother Martin. Upon our repentance, he claimed, Suleiman's power will be weakened. He

will lose his Big Gun. He will cease to be the rod of God's anger, since God responds graciously to repenting people. 'Course we'll still have Suleiman and his 600K out there. But then they are at least theoretically beatable, bereft as they then will be of their divine ally. Without that ally they are just human.

That was the theological rationale for his "military" strategy. So he called "Christian Europe" to repent for its phony Christianity, even though he was not sanguine that many would do so. He knew that on the "Turkish" issue in 1529 he was a voice crying in the wilderness. Some even called him traitor. Nevertheless he encouraged the faithful few, the remnant, to repent, reminding them of the Biblical precedent (and promise) that vicarious repentance "works." There are no statistics about responses to Luther's call for repentance. But someone, someones, must have done so. Maybe just Luther, Katie and the kids around the supper table. For this much is in the history books: Suleiman and his 600K turned around and went home, never attacking Vienna. Europe was saved.

And now a word from Amos 4:

*(God speaking) I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return [=same Hebrew word for "repentance"] to me, says the LORD. And the litany continues:*

*I withheld the rain from you...*

*I struck you with blight and mildew...*

*I sent among you a pestilence...*

*I overthrew some of you...*

*With this verse-by-verse refrain:*

*Yet you did not return to me, says the LORD.*

*And with this closure:*

*Therefore . . . prepare to meet your God, O Israel.*

This is not Gospel. It is a call to repentance. But without saying yes to this we never get to the Gospel. Better said, the Gospel never gets to us. And in the promise of such repentance and of such Gospel for our own nation in agony,

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **A Book Review: Pastoral Care for Iraq/Afghanistan veterans.**

Colleagues,

More American veterans of the Vietnam war died by suicide after returning home than the 50 thousand who came home in body bags, whose names are inscribed on the monument in Washington, DC. The lethal nature of war persists even when they come home alive—and (allegedly) unscarred. Here's a look at all that from the inside. Reviewer Matthew Becker's father was one such survivor who came home wounded. Severely so. Becker reviews here for us a book about those badly damaged survivors, that then goes on to spell out the rubrics for distinctive Christian care to move them to fuller recovery. Matt is a prof in the Theology Department of Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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When my dad returned from Korea in the fall of 1951 he was a wreck. He had been severely wounded in the Battle of Heartbreak Ridge. Actually pronounced dead on the battlefield and then later found breathing, he was rushed to a MASH unit, stabilized, and sent back to the states for months of rehabilitation. He was blind in one eye, partially blind in the other, deaf in one ear. He had lost part of his brain. Bullet wounds and grenade fragments had left other scars on his chest, legs, and head. But the more troubling scars were hidden, psychological, moral, soul-scars. His father, a Lutheran chaplain at the Oregon State Hospital, and mother did their best to try to help their 20-year-old son to accept what had happened to his body and to move on with his life, but they were overwhelmed by the challenges to help heal his spirit. As my grandfather told me later (I was born a decade after my dad was injured), the only medicine for the deepest wounds were the gospel and persistent Christian love and care. At my dad's funeral I commented on how my dad had died twice before his final physical death: the first death was in his baptism, when he died with Christ and was raised to new life in him, and second was on that fateful day in October, 1951. His "third" death happened in June, 2004, long after the 7-10 years that the VA doctors had given him to live after his terrible injuries. Of course, in between these "deaths" my dad died daily in remembrance of his baptism. Such daily dying was necessary, especially when memories of what he had done in the war surfaced to trouble his conscience. (One evening, decades after that Forgotten War, while my dad was watching a report on the news about Korean and Vietnam widows and orphans, he began to cry. "Maybe I killed that woman's husband or that child's father or brother..." We three kids went to bed early that night.)

I often think about my dad when I see reports about the young service personnel who are returning with similar wounds from

Iraq and Afghanistan. What kind of spiritual care will they receive for their troubled souls?

Given that nearly 70,000 Americans have been severely injured in these wars and that 500,000+ have been injured or damaged in other ways, both physical and psychological, Christian caregivers and church workers will likely face situations where they will be called upon to provide ministry to such individuals and their families.

My grandparents could have benefited from the booklet, WELCOME THEM HOME—HELP THEM HEAL: PASTORAL CARE AND MINISTRY WITH SERVICE MEMBERS RETURNING FROM WAR, a 2009 publication of Elim Lutheran Church of Blackhoof (Barnum, MN) that was written by John Sippola (military and hospital chaplain, parish pastor), Amy Blumenshine (candidate for diaconal ministry in the ELCA), Donald Tubesing (retired pastor, prolific author on wellness and stress management), and Valerie Yancey (professor of nursing). Blumenshine has an MSW and a masters in theology, and both Tubesing and Yancey have earned doctorates (in counseling and nursing ethics[!], respectively). The book was partially underwritten by a grant from Wheat Ridge Ministries.

The purpose of the book is to provide knowledge and resources for pastors, parish nurses, counselors, and Christian caregivers in their ministry to service personnel and their families. By reading the book, I gained new understanding of the challenges that military personnel face before, during, and after deployment. Frankly, I learned about my dad and his similar combat and post-combat experience, even though he served in a different war half a century ago.

All wars are not the same and these current American wars are unique in several respects, not least because the mental and spiritual trauma of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is extensive

and intense. A key strength of the booklet is how it offers helpful avenues for addressing these deep and widespread wounds.

The book is divided into six brief chapters. After an introduction that underscores how serious the crisis of care is for America's combat veterans, the first chapter provides an historical overview of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Chapter two is devoted to an analysis of the challenges that military personnel face when they return from foreign wars to civilian life. Chapter three helps the reader to understand the complexities of warrior wounds, the ones that have injured the body, the ones that have done damage to the conscience, the ones that have done damage to the spirit. The final three chapters define three key roles that Christian churches have with respect to caring for wounded veterans. The first role is "to reach out" to each individual veteran by listening and encouraging self-expression, by relating to the veteran and not the war, by offering honest encouragement, by encouraging self-care, by making appropriate referrals to professionals, by praying, by being genuine and trustworthy, by receiving care themselves. The second role of the church is "to create a healing environment." Caregivers within Christian communities do this by being tactful, offering hospitality, praying for veterans and their families, creating a "circle of care," remembering veterans in regular staff meetings, learning about the phases of military service (pre-deployment, deployment, post-deployment, re-deployment), working toward peace, allowing for confession and forgiveness and making amends. A final role for the church is to provide healing rituals throughout the church year. This chapter offers several creative ways that congregations can implement spiritual healing exercises and activities into the rhythm of the church year, e.g., one Lutheran congregation developed a Lenten worship series to address personal and communal "spiritual wounds" and the brokenness of war.

While these chapters offer a wealth of practical tips and advice on helping veterans to heal, I was a little surprised that the theological dimension of that healing process was not more explicitly articulated in the chapter that summarizes the church's "first role." The primary role of the church is to proclaim and teach the gospel and administer the sacraments according to the gospel. This role involves inviting individual members of the congregation, including veterans, to repent of their sins and to trust that for Christ's sake they are forgiven. That, of course, is what my Grandfather said finally was most helpful to my dad in his healing. Certainly the gospel is implied throughout the book as essential in the healing process, but there really isn't any careful articulation of how the gospel specifically applies to the lives of these veterans in that chapter four, where it would best fit. What difference does Jesus really make for combat veterans? The lack of explicit gospel articulation in chapter four was the most glaring weakness of the book to me. For example, in that chapter, "Basic Principle #3: Offer honest encouragement" begins with the following assurances: "It's not your fault. Your struggles, whatever form they take, are not your fault nor are they signs of weakness" (p. 52). Are Christian caregivers ever really in a position to say this, especially if in fact some of the veteran's struggle is due to actions (or inactions) that the combat veteran is convinced were sinful? It would seem to me that an appropriate pastoral response to the veteran who struggles with guilt and anxiety, at least in some pastoral situations, is not to excuse or deny or explain away the veteran's guilt, but to help the veteran to come to the point of being able to confess "the struggle" and guilt to God and to receive the forgiveness of Christ. Perhaps one ought to help the veteran to die daily with Christ and rise anew in Christ's mercy and forgiveness. (Sacramental theology is not really addressed until the final chapter on liturgical practices that promote

healing.) Thankfully, chapter five does in fact underscore this need for Christ's forgiveness in the section, "coming to grips with guilt," which does involve confession and forgiveness. Maybe the problem here is one of placement. Wouldn't Lutherans put a section on "law" and "gospel" in chapter four ("the church's first role") and at least acknowledge that *Anfechtungen* ("spiritual struggles") and the accusatory nature of God's law in one's conscience ("guilt") are results of sin that all sinners experience, and that these are only properly addressed through the consolation of the gospel of Christ crucified and risen? That seems to me to be the church's primary role, and thus an articulation of that role belongs in chapter four and not mentioned in passing at the end of chapter five.

Three appendices are tagged on at the end. The first addresses how to make a referral for a veteran and includes an overview of the Veterans Administration and helpful community resources for veterans (such as online organizations). The second appendix includes several screening tools that parish nurses could use for preliminary detection of possible Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, and traumatic brain injury. These tools are not diagnostic, but are designed to help a caregiver to decide if further evaluation would be helpful. The final appendix is a "wounds of war assessment," which is designed to help the caregiver "identify factors that may affect the health and well-being of veterans who have served in combat and thereby suffered wounds of war" (p. 103).

The style of writing makes each chapter understandable and interesting. Helpful quotations from veterans of several wars, caregivers, and professionals are highlighted in the margins to connect human experiences with the themes in each chapter. "Key point" boxes are interspersed throughout. At the end of each chapter there is a page for the reader to make notes to him- or herself. This is a very practical resource that Christian

congregations will want to utilize in their outreach and ministry to veterans and their families.

To order a copy of the booklet (\$10) and learn about additional resources, visit <http://www.welcomethemhomebook.com/>.

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## **Another One from the Archives: Bob Bertram Requiem**

Colleagues,

Marie and I moved on Monday. Better said, “were” moved. By a crew of nine, family and friends with a beeeeg U-Haul and the smarts about the task to be done. To Hidden Lake Senior Living Community under the umbrella of Lutheran Senior Services. [Go to <http://lssliving.org/> for the full skinny. The fact that the CEO, John R. Kotovsky, took a few Crossings courses when he was younger doesn’t hurt.] We now live in suburban north St. Louis, a half-hour drive from our old digs in midtown. As you can imagine, the realities of a 50% space reduction are still being worked out. And there is fallout. E.g., from those file cabinets, with papers such as this one, my words at Bob Bertram’s funeral May 22, 2003.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **RWB REQUIEM**

At Luther's funeral, Philip Melanchthon was the preacher. His most poignant words were: "Most of all I thank God for Martin Luther because he taught me the Gospel."

Bob Bertram taught me the Gospel. Many of you here are saying the same. For me it started 55 years ago – I was 18 – when he was my teacher at Valparaiso University. Bob was in the philosophy department, but that's where theology was being done. Valpo's mad genius president O.P.Kretzmann had hired Bob – along with other young hotshots like Jaroslav Pelikan and Dick Luecke (all in the philosophy dept.) – to put meat on the bones of the University's vision to join Athens and Jerusalem. "High academic scholarship and high religion," as OP liked to call it. But the blueprint was fuzzy. So the hotshots were called in to work it out.

After Pelikan and Luecke moved to other callings, Bob stayed on (a total of 15 years) to work out that blueprint. He pulled it straight from the theology of the Lutheran Reformation, actually straight from Luther–his debate with Erasmus and his Galatians commentary–the focus of his doctoral work at the University of Chicago. The blueprint was actually simple. For reading the Bible it is the law/Gospel lenses. For reading the world and for acting in the world it's the same lenses: God's law at work to care for that world and God's Gospel promise to redeem it. For the last 30 years he called it Crossings.

After Bob was my college teacher in the 1940s, I later joined him as teaching colleague at Valpo. We worked on the blueprint together, and as he sometimes said, the two of us have been "joined at the hip" ever since. At Concordia Seminary, at Seminex, and in the Crossings Community he founded.

Bob had thousands of students during his years of teaching. And

surprising as it may sound, that number increases even though he has died. Bob's theological paradigm has a website. Law/promise theology as we learned it from Bob gets posted each week on the Crossings website. The response grows and grows. It's now nearly 1200 "hits" each day That's almost one per minute. Last year 59,000 different folks (from well over 100 different countries) visited the website to check out law/promise theology.

Bob and I were buddies. That's his word. Seminex colleague Andy Weyermann said we were like the Lone Ranger and Tonto. [Later I learned what "tonto" really meant, namely, simple-minded.] Even so, Bob could talk the language of the University of Chicago and do law/promise theology with the eggheads, and Farmboy Ed could do likewise with the students not quite so gifted. It was a strange and wonderful relationship. [You can guess which adjective applied to which one of us.]

The Lone Ranger image is a good one. For Bob was also a "masked man," even to this buddy. There was more going on inside than he ever let me see. How many times did a conversation end with him saying: "I'll have to tell you about that some time." But such times never came—even as we spent lots of time together in the last months at his bedside. But one thing I did hear at his bedside that I'd never heard before: "Eddy, the FUN we had—at Valpo, at Seminex, in Crossings. And it was all FREE! But you'd better go home now. I can't take much more of this."

Like the Lone Ranger, Bob also used silver bullets, colloquial expressions for the specifics of law/promise theology. The besetting sin of us "good folks," was the "Pharisee heresy." Christ's work on the cross, what Luther called the "froehlicher Wechsel," became God's "sweet swap" with sinners. When Law and Gospel contended, the Gospel finally "trumped" the Law.. See the banner over there carried in many a Seminex procession. "We shall rise our Lord to meet, treading death beneath our feet."

In the banner the word “Death” is silver (that’s powerful), but “Our Lord” is gold. Gold trumps silver.]

One of the silver bullets was his “folksy’ retelling of the gospel for this past Sunday. Reminiscere is its ancient name, the Sunday in Lent to remember how God remembers us – “in gold.” The text speaks about trying to save your life and still losing it versus losing your life for Christ’s sake, and then gaining it all back again. In the Bertram version: Life is not win/lose. Nor is it win/win, says Jesus. It’s lose/lose. But there are two different ways to lose. One is hanging onto your life like this – arms crossed clutching close to the chest – and that is “Lose PERIOD!” The other is giving your life away connected to Christ – arms extended outward. You still lose your life, but it’s “Lose COMMA.” And there is another clause coming.

Today we mark God’s COMMA to the life of blessed Bob. The rest of the sentence of Bob’s life story is on the banner.

March 22, 2003

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## **A Book Review: Dean Lueking, “Through Their Eyes. A People’s View of the Global Church”**

Colleagues,

Dean Lueking’s face is on my graduation class photo (Concordia

Seminary, 1954). We've continued to be "joined at the hip" ever since. Paul Ananth Tambyah came into Marie's and my life in 2004 when the Evangelical Church in America [ELCA] sent us to work with the Lutheran Church of Singapore as Global Mission Volunteers. My spiffy title was "Theologian in Residence." Every Monday morning was a seminar with pastors and church leaders. Every two weeks during our stint there we were farmed out to work in/with another congregation in the LCP. Paul crossed our path when his congregation asked for a Crossings workshop and we learned what a Lutheran theologian this medical doctor – Senior Consultant Infectious Diseases, Physician and Associate Professor of Medicine at the National University of Singapore and National University Hospital – was, and still is. That connection continues. [Even medically. When I came home from Singapore with some Asian bug, Paul was in on the consult at Barnes Hospital here in town as experts tried to isolate just what bug was bugging me. Paul gave them the laundry list to check for. I got better.] But it is Crossings that has Paul hooked. So much so that he not only showed up for a Crossings conference here in St. Louis, but he has also recruited several Asian Lutheran pastors to attend other Crossings gatherings. Irrepressible, he's got three more lined up to come to our next conference in January. [You'd be blessed to be there too. The lineup (see our homepage) is creme-de-la-creme.]

Paul doesn't confine his calling(s) to the hospital. lecture hall and the Lutheran Church of Singapore. He's a public figure in the life (and politics?) of his country, a city-state of 4 million people, with an area comparable to that of metropolitan St. Louis. I got over 21K references when I googled his name. Check [this URL](http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/08/08/paul-tambyah-ten-thousand-people-speaking-up-cannot-be-ignored/) for one sample: <http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/08/08/paul-tambyah-ten-thousand-people-speaking-up-cannot-be-ignored/>

For more about Dean Lueking, read what Paul says below.

Peace and joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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**Dean Lueking. THROUGH THEIR EYES. A PEOPLE'S VIEW OF THE GLOBAL CHURCH, Chicago: Tyra Books. 472 pp. [Purchase info at the end of the review]**

Nearly a year ago, Ed Schroeder wrote to me to ask me to write a book review of Dean Lueking's book "Through Their Eyes" which is ambitiously subtitled, "A people's view of the global church." I could not resist the offer. I had met Rev. Lueking briefly when he came to Singapore and had enjoyed his presentation to Lutheran ministers and lay people at our own church. I did not know at the time that he was on a global journey that would take him around the world and result in this fascinating masterpiece. Ed has demonstrated a remarkable amount of patience in allowing me to take this long to complete the review but I see where he came from in asking a fifth-generation Christian living in Singapore in the middle of Southeast Asia to review a manuscript on global Christianity by a distinguished Lutheran churchman from suburban Chicago. This is more than a manuscript, however, it is a collection of stories, of testimonials, to the grace of an unchanging God in an ever-changing world.

Lueking begins where it all began, most appropriately in Bethlehem. This is, however, not the Christmas card Bethlehem of neat roofs, pretty sheep and shepherds and solitary stars over pastoral scenes of family bliss. It is the reality of Bethlehem in the here and now, a city that is under military occupation, in what his first interviewees describe as an "open air prison" where a Christian Arab was told that "he could die at the side of the road" by the border guard when his wife tried to take him

to the hospital for his heart attack. Naturally, Lueking asks, "How does one continue to live under such conditions of injustice and humiliation?" The answer comes from two veteran Palestinian Lutheran clergymen, Rev. Mitri Raheb and Bishop Munib Younan, who try to bring about reconciliation between the occupying Israeli forces and the Christian and Muslim Palestinians who have been living together for centuries. The answer is in the incarnational life of Christ in these embattled believers who trust in the Promise Giver even as they strive not to repay evil with evil but rather bear witness to the Good News that continues to go from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

He moves on to Africa, and for some reason (probably logistic) concentrates on the eastern part of that vast continent – Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia, as well as the island of Madagascar (not the cartoon jungle!). Kenya is covered by the remarkable story of a single individual, a young man, a 6 foot 7 refugee from South Sudan who makes contact with the Uhuru Lutheran Church and is supported by Rev. Lueking's River Forest Church through Pharmacy school under the mentorship of a Kenyan Lutheran leader. By the time of the Luekings' second visit to Kenya, this young man has graduated and is returning to South Sudan to work in an NGO to help others in a similar position to himself. This is another of the strengths of this book: it provides practical examples with names and faces of how congregations in the wealthier parts of the Kingdom of God can make a huge difference in the lives of individuals living in the two-thirds world. Ethiopia is more comprehensively covered with stories from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), one of the fastest-growing Lutheran churches in the world. Pastor Geneti Wayessa talks about the "Ethiopian Bonhoeffer" Gudina Tumsa, the theologian who died for his faith under the brutal dictatorship of the 1970s. Many Ethiopian seminarians, both men and women, have their say as they are challenged by Lueking on issues such

as polygamy or living on a \$100-a-month pastor's stipend. Itaffa Gobena, the EECMY President, rounds up the Ethiopian tales with his own story – one which is typical of the Ethiopians and in fact, of so many fast-growing church movements throughout Asia and Africa: growing up nominally Christian, having a “charismatic experience” with healing or speaking in tongues or some other visible manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, persevering through persecution from the Marxists to leading growing ministries, 100% indigenous. Lueking recounts these stories non-judgmentally, not attempting to dissect the theology which has torn apart many congregations nor unquestioningly embracing this rejection of tradition for the demonstrative and visible form of religion. This comes up again in his discussions with a church leader in Tanzania who describes “the African cultural” response to a homosexual parishioner in violent terms that would be unacceptable in even the most “conservative” parts of the United States. This dispassionate reporting of “international perspectives” is a little disconcerting at first, but on second reading, it is probably the only way to be true to the individuals through whose eyes Lueking seeks to view the Christian world. Inevitably, AIDS and poverty appear in Tanzania as Lueking spends time with a missionary and with a Lutheran orphanage. Here, we acknowledge, as the church in Africa has grown through “signs and wonders” and becomes increasingly self-supporting and indigenous, there are still huge needs from the twin plagues of disease and economic devastation that demand far more than the resources of a young and growing church can provide. However, the “formula” for church growth in Africa is more than just pioneering missionaries followed by charismatic renewals. The solid church growth he describes is exemplified by hundreds of “shepherds,” people like Germaine Baolava, a lay woman in Madagascar who trains for three years for the ministry of word, healing (both physical and spiritual) prayer and care for the

marginalized.

Moving on to Eastern Europe and Russia, Lueking finds seminarians in Russia who come from all across the vast former empire and share the challenges of being Lutheran and Russian. He finds Slovak teachers in Lutheran schools and Lithuanian lay leaders who all shared the horrors of living through persecution during the Communist era and the challenges of freedom including nationalism, economics and all the attendant changes that the new era brought.

Moving closer to the heart of Luther-land, Lueking prefaces his sojourn in Western Europe with the common American tourist comment about beautiful and empty churches. In spite of this, Lueking finds hope as he describes the Berlin city mission and a Lutheran nunnery in Darmstadt, among other innovative ministries of the church in Germany. In Denmark, he quotes a Danish church leader, Kaj Bollmann, as saying “-Denmark may be viewed as the most secular place in Europe but don’t think of the church here as a lost cause; it is visible and working in a typically Danish way, modestly, without fanfare about itself.” Similar stories come from Norway where Lueking talks with the ordained minister who was twice Prime Minister of Norway; Sweden, where church attendances are hovering at around 2% of the population; and Finland where in the words of Pastor Olli Valtonen, “Everybody loves the church but nobody goes there.”

He moves next to Central America with a compelling narrative beginning with the defining point that Lutherans in Central America “bear the marks of Christ.” In El Salvador, the Luekings dine with Medardo Gomez, who was confirmed by the legendary martyr Bishop Oscar Romero but became a Lutheran minister because of a family issue, who was persecuted for a Cross. They interact with Christian Chavarria, a former child soldier; Bishop Victoria Cortez, once a refugee, now a Lutheran Bishop; a

person living with AIDS in Costa Rica; as well as many other Lutheran lay people and ministers whose faith had kept them going through the tumultuous 1980s and 1990s.

In Peru and Bolivia, he meets the church responding to poverty, indigenous cultures, the aftermath of dictatorship (and the trauma of Sep.11, 1973 in Chile) [Allende assassination. Ed]. Rev. Lueking interacts with both sides of a divided church in Chile, the faculty of the world's largest Lutheran University in Brazil with 156,000 students across 13 campuses, workers in ministries to the neediest in the slums of Brazil, and creative ministries in Argentina. Here the most intriguing observations are made – how can the church in Latin America relate to Catholicism even in its most Marian forms and to Pentecostalism which seems to be sweeping all before it?

He then crosses the globe to Asia, beginning in Japan, where a seminarian recognizes the preeminence of Jesus Christ while building bridges to Shinto practitioners, and he meets members of the tiny and aging Lutheran churches in Japan. He then moves to Korea where Christianity has gone from 0.5% of the population to more than 40% with mega-churches of both Pentecostal and Presbyterian varieties. The Lutheran church in Korea is small but reflective and recognizing its role in this complex modern yet ancient society facing a nuclear armed brother nation across the demilitarized zone. Next stop is the world's most populous country, China. Here we discover the Concordia International School in Shanghai, tolerated by the Communist Chinese authorities. Conversations follow with seminarians who have gone on to ministry in both the prosperous coastal cities as well as the rural Chinese countryside. He visits the famous Tao Fong Shan centre in Hong Kong where a powerful Asian theology is being crafted in a setting which looks like one of the Shaolin temples of the kung fu movies. Taiwan, which is home to six different Lutheran denominations, gets a good overview too,

including fascinating accounts of pastors with both traditional and unusual ministries (to mail order brides!). India has eleven Lutheran bodies and more than a billion people. Lueking visits a slum ministry, discusses church politics and gets a flavour of the diversity of the church and Christian life in South India.

His sojourn in Indonesia begins with the late Armencius Munthe who is no stranger to the Crossings Community. I had the privilege of sharing a room with Bishop Munthe at the Crossings Conference a couple of winters ago and visiting with him and his son at Trinity Theological College in Singapore. I can attest to the accuracy of Lueking's description of this lively, dynamic saint of Sumatra. In my own home church, the Lutheran Church of Singapore, Lueking was able to meet with both our former and current Bishops, who gave him good insights into some of the challenges and opportunities we face as a small church body in a fast changing and growing Southeast Asian country. Next door to us in Malaysia, Lueking again tells fascinating stories ranging from the Bishop to a Lutheran legislator, among others.

Finally in the last section of the book on Papua New Guinea and Australia, we get the tribespeople in colourful garb that used to characterize missionary journey reports of the past. Yet, these are treated with respect and engaged as they are, and consequently the challenges they face of economic pressures, AIDS, crime and church conflict come through just as they would anywhere else. In Australia, at the tail end of the book, most appropriately, frank, heartfelt conversations are recorded with Australian Lutherans, men and women, seminarians, pastors and lay people. The realities of a changing and increasingly secular world are discussed with people who have been in the mission fields of both rural Papua New Guinea and ultramodern Australia. The message is the same: people are still in need of Good News whether they are people who have just left the stone age in Papua New Guinea or the family vineyard in South Australia, as

the Madagascar Christians put it – every believer is a missionary as the field is so vast.

What is so special about this book? First off, I do not think that there is anything like it – a tale of the Lutheran Church around the world. It is not a book of facts and figures. It is a book of stories that are great reading. There are tales of heroism, tales of woe, tales of hope and tales of wonder. At the same time, these are stories about us, stories about people who believed in God and trusted Him with their lives, their families, their careers and their ministries. They are also stories about our conflicts with our neighbours – both Christian and non-Christian – as we struggle to witness in a secular society where economics and information overload dominate, or in pluralistic religious communities where Christians are an embattled minority. Within the church, we hear the stories that are so familiar about the “worship wars,” about the fact that the church cannot ignore the “signs and wonders” movement that has brought rapid growth but huge theological questions across Asia, Africa and Latin America. We also hear stories about Lutheran Christians across the world struggling with sexuality and the debates that accompany those issues. Lueking tells the stories like a storyteller, a bit like the great Studs Terkel of Chicago. He does not pass judgment, although you get a hint of where his sympathies lie. At the same time, he provides quiet insights into how Christians from the richer world can give a little in partnership with the local churches in the poorest parts of the world and make a huge difference. He also shows how Christians from the richer world can learn lessons in faith from our brothers and sisters from across the globe. There are some minor errors such as describing the “Somoza regime in El Salvador” [it was in Nicaragua. Ed] and sometimes you wish that there was a pastoral commentary to some of the reports (in particular some of those from East Africa or Japan, for

example). Otherwise, it is an excellent book and as someone living in the world described in the book, I wish that all American Lutherans would be able to see the Lutheran world "Through Our Eyes" nearly as well as Dean Lueking does.

*[Purchase info: In order to keep the book price at \$25, Dean is doing much of the marketing of Through Their Eyes himself. The quickest way to get a copy is to send him a check for \$30 (\$5 extra covers postage and handling) to Dean Lueking, 829 Lathrop Ave, River Forest, IL 60305 with your name and address. You will have your own copy pronto. In addition, Dean is making a special offer for book discussion groups: Order a box of 12 copies at \$15.00 each (40% discount) and receive free shipping as well. Several pastoral friends have found such groups beneficial for broadening a global church awareness. For this offer, please send a check for \$180 (12 x \$15.00) to the above address.]*