

Seminaries are the problem, not the solution.

Thursday Theology #824

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Topic: Seminaries are the problem, not the solution.

This week we're happy to send you another new piece by Ed Schroeder. In it, he ruminates on an alternate educational model for training pastors—an idea that struck him at the fortieth anniversary gathering for [Seminex](#) last month in Chicago.

Peace and Joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

“Seminaries are the problem, not the solution for theological education today.” That was my quip from the audience at last month's fortieth birthday party of Seminex, where the topic was being discussed by a panel of Seminex alums.

Uttered at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. With the seminary president present! It elicited no response. So nothing happened.

But, as you can see, I haven't forgotten it. Though other things do often disappear, sometimes within seconds, from my memory bank nowadays.

[Many in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA] do agree that the eight seminaries in our denomination *are* a

problem. But for most of them it's the number of them that's the problem, not whether seminary-based education is a problem in itself. The acknowledged problem is that there are simply too many, too costly, too redundant for what's needed. And why can't that be fixed? Answer: the mantra of Fiddler on the Roof: "Tradition! Tradition!" Even though LSTC itself was a merger of four Lutheran seminaries way back when it began in 1962, apparently no one can conjure a formula today to go and do likewise.]

That birthday-party discussion took place in the chapel at LSTC. Through the wall-long window behind the panelists the audience looked out across 55th Street onto the campus of the University of Chicago. Which prompted a couple more sentences, added on to my own one-liner above. "U.S. seminaries are modeled after that school across the street. Learn the theory before you go out and practice the art. But is that what pastoral ministry is all about? Wouldn't it be worth reconsidering the old guild model of training for a profession? Apprentice students to folks on the panel in front of us, "Meisters" in the pastoral trade. Students move from novice to journeyman—actually journeying to stints with other Meisters—and finally to what the final Meister thinks is Meister status. Then a panel of Meisters, such as the ones sitting in front of us, examines the candidates. Yes, then it's pass/fail. As in *The Meistersingers of Nuremberg*. But it's unlikely to be "fail" since the Meister presenting the candidate wouldn't bring anyone before the examiners without being confident that that candidate was fully meister-haft.

I'm sure I didn't say all that at that time, but that's the picture. And a Crossings connection came to mind already then.

There is a pre-Seminex piece to the history of Crossings, an artifact from six weeks before Seminex came into being. It's a seven-page document.

Crossings, Inc. (St. Louis)

A Proposal

Robert W. Bertram.

Epiphany 1974

Background. Epiphany 1974 was (as usual) January 6. It was a Sunday. Two Sundays later, January 20, the Concordia Seminary Board of Control suspended John Tietjen from his presidential duties. If any on the faculty knew that was about to happen, I was not one of them.

On that Epiphany evening eight or ten of us on the faculty gathered for an evening meeting in the library. Basically the topic was, What shall we do if/when we are tossed out of the kingdom? When we *too* are tossed out. For “You’re out!” had already been spoken to several of our colleagues. Arlis Ehlen, the first victim. It seemed to be the plan of Missouri Synod president Preus that the “bad guys” at the seminary would be picked off one by one, possibly until Preus thought the seminary was “conservative enough” according to his own rubrics, or until he had satiated the alligators surrounding the seminary with enough bodies.

The bunch of us who gathered that Epiphany evening knew we were on the alligators’ list, so we reconnoitered. We began with each of us giving verbal input. When it was Bob’s turn, he presented his seven-page paper, his detailed covers-the-waterfront idea for what we could do if another half dozen or so of us got sacked.

[It’s on the Crossings website.](#) Check it out. A fantastic proposal. But quintessential Bertram. Every paragraph, even the wildest ones, with “zureichender Begründung,” sufficient reason, for attempting such unheard-of stuff in theological education.

For my purposes here, I draw on that part of the proposal that did eventually take flesh in the semester-long courses that Crossings, Inc., offered when it emerged ten years later. I want to relate this to the guild model of seminary education above.

If one should contend, "But they should *know* something first, shouldn't they, even before they start as novices?" then consider this Bertram bit:

In one of Bob's paradigms, a student would be enrolled in classes for the first year, accumulating thirty credit hours. In that year, ten three-credit classes. Each class with a Biblical study component (pericope texts parsed à la Crossings method), then samples of past and present history and theology linked to the theme of those texts, and then the "practical" element where the student, in a seminar paper, tracks some current reality in church or world, and crosses it with the theology studied in the first two segments of the course.

What does the student have by then? Ten credit hours in "Bible," ten in church history and theology, ten in practical theology. Okay, now out into the world as novice to a Meister. Then the journeyman stage, then the rite of passage before a panel of Meisters.

Is that so novel? Not really. Jesus' disciples were educated in exactly that mode, weren't they? When they call him "Master," they are not saying "Boss," but Meister, the one who's showing us how to do it. Encouraging us when we get it right, slapping our fingers when we don't, and in those cases saying, "Now watch me. Follow me. *This* is the way to do it."

Wimbledon and the World Cup are going on as I write. No one of those Meisters whom we see on the screen ever learned their trade in a classroom. It was all out there on location with a Meister showing the way, the "how to." And then there's the

famous response to the person asking for directions in New York City: "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?"—Practice, practice, practice.

Isn't the seminary model we have for theological education still basically "German"? Just too, too Teutonic? [And I speak as product thereof with my degree from the University of Hamburg.] The Humboldt University in Berlin is the Ur-text, I suspect. And with that the German *Aufklärung*, the enlightenment. First comes knowledge, head-knowledge, and after achieving that you can practice. Arts and sciences are the dynamic duo of the classic university. "Art" in its Latin/Greek meaning, a skill; and "scientia" too in its classical meaning, knowledge. But the working premise is that the knowledge must come first. The head then instructs the hand. But is real life really like that? First "scientia," then the "art," the skill, will follow? First go to the seminary, then you can be a pastor?

Is that some crypto-gnosticism—maybe not so crypto—in the mix? In how much of daily life, isn't it the reverse process, the hand teaches the head? You get the knowledge into your brain by first learning to master the skill.

Permit this bit of personal biography. As the first-born son of farmer Henry Schroeder, I learned a lot about how to farm before I even got to first grade in school. I followed dad around the farm, my filial calling. [I don't remember him saying, as Jesus did for his disciples, "Follow me," but that is what happened.] It was show and tell. "Watch me, and do what I just did." So by the time I was eight or nine I could harness horses, plow a furrow, milk cows, even drive the new tractor we got, and, ere long, drive the truck, long before I ever reached the age for a driver's license. But then on country roads traffic officers never showed up.

Isn't that dangerous? To let kids do grown-up stuff? Sometimes. I did at age eight have a "runaway" with our team of old mares, Queen and Nellie. Dad sent me home with Queen and Nell and the empty hayrack from a field a mile away. In pre-pubescent hybris, I rein-slapped them into a gallop on the country road. As we approached the farm home gate, I couldn't get them to slow down. I knew it was a runaway, but Dad had told me about his runaway when he was a kid (and he almost died). "Let 'em go until they just wear out." In my case it wasn't quite that simple. They did not keep racing down the road. Instead they crashed through the farm gate—they knew where home was. They did finally "wear out" as we roared around the farmhouse in the center of the barnyard, and we did all survive. It was a learning experience in both the art and science of farming with horses. I learned something I've never forgotten for now seventy-five years!

Summa

There are dangers in every educational paradigm. Also in theological education. No fool-proof, no fail-safe guarantees. Not only in the process, but also in the product. That snarky line about medical education applies to pastoral education too. "What do you call the person who finishes last in the class at med school?" Answer: "Doctor." Ditto for theological education: "Pastor." And the guild model isn't a sure thing either. Quality control is never 100 percent.

Even so, if the guild model was standard for the education of the first-ever Christian pastors, and not just the first set of twelve, but the next generations as well (Silas, Titus, Timothy, Phoebe, Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, and maybe even Tecla too), why not give it a try again? I won't say "Jesus said so," but the precedents are there.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. The Seminex birthday bash last month. A cloud-nine homecoming event, as you might imagine. Holy hoopla, and some less so too. Eight of our alums are ELCA bishops. Another is the ELCA secretary. Seven of the nine showed up. Super pastors, super bishops. Six of the still-breathing eighteen faculty folks were there. Those eighteen are the remnant of the original forty-five. Four of the nine (according to my count) profs' widows who are still among the living. Scads of alums, don't know the number. Yes, spouses, children, and grandchildren too. Plus goldie-oldie allies from ancient days—William Leshner, Martin Marty, James Scherer, names I can now recall. The old Seminex stump, the original branch, now a veritable forest. A grove, at least. Better said biblically: a great cloud of witnesses.

Augsburg, Ramadan, and ISIS

A little over two weeks ago, Ed Schroeder sent us the following piece on the occasion of the (then imminent) anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. We're pleased to bring it to you today, with a few small edits to account for the fact that we're publishing it two weeks later than Ed had hoped.

Peace and Joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

Colleagues,

June 25 was the 484th anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to the potentates of the Holy Roman Empire.

The year was 1530. And June 28 of this year, 2014, was the beginning of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. Already by that date an estimated 500,000 Iraqis had been displaced by the recent weeks' surge of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) from Mosul toward Baghdad. [See the June 29 infographic at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/29/world/middleeast/a-reignited-war-drives-iraqis-out-in-huge-numbers.html>] Any connection between those three events? Maybe. At least in my head.

For way back then at Augsburg in 1530, almost half a millennium ago, there was a definite Muslim component. Namely this: Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566) was bringing Islam to the West. By 1529 he was outside the gates of Vienna, having just scorch-earthed his way through the "Christian" Balkans and now laying siege—with 600,000 troops!—to Vienna, the eastern outpost of "Christian" Europe, the Holy Roman Empire. That was the major reason—yes, politics—for Charles V, the emperor of the HRE, to convoke a council, the Diet of Augsburg.

The agenda for the consultation: Is Suleiman unstoppable? If not, how can we stop him? Especially now that messy Martin Luther has loused up the Christian unity we once had throughout the HRE?

So first off, let's gather at Augsburg. Let's try to restore that frazzled Christian unity. You Luther-followers [N.B., all of them political leaders in the various segments of the empire, none of them clergy], you present a statement of what you think the Christian faith is and we'll get the establishment church folks to do likewise and we'll see if we can scissors and paste the two of them together. Then, with the empire reunified, we can get on with the business of Suleiman.

The item I want to raise here in linking Augsburg and Islam is their intersection not in 1530 but today, focusing on all the

current kerfuffle in the West about what we are going to do about ISIS storming its way toward Baghdad.

Isn't ISIS itself the Sunni side of the thousand-year-plus confessional fight within Islam? Don't Sunni and Shia need an Augsburg conference? Isn't that what we Westerners are telling them?

How on earth—yes, on this earth—can we in the West get “them” to have their own Augsburg consultation and scissors and paste together a peaceful co-existence? Consider the following plausible parallel.

The parallel, so it seems to me, would be for Suleiman, way back then, to have invited himself to the Christian gathering at Augsburg—it's 251 miles between Vienna and Augsburg (St. Louis to Kansas City)—and presented himself as arbiter and “disinterested third party” to scissors and paste together a Christian unity in the HRE. Wouldn't everyone call that madness on his part? True, that would be living up to his name: Suleiman = peace-maker. But, but, but....

Well, then....

But Europeans, at least until recent decades, and we Americans unendingly, have an addiction to applying the “omni-” adjectives to ourselves. “Omnipotent, omniscient,” all-powerful, all-knowing—and, especially today for American military presence, “omnipresent” throughout the globe.

But those adjectives are proper only for the creator, never ever for the creature. Building towers of Babel to take over the realm of heaven was a mistake, a calamity, the very first time it was attempted. And every subsequent attempt since then.

Isn't that what the American adventure in the Middle East has

been, right from the git-go? An American version of a Suleiman trying to create peace at Augsburg? Madness. The madness of hybris. The madness of a "Stormin' Norman," not simply stormin' into Baghdad, but stormin' the gates of heaven. Playing god. First-commandment stuff.

And so it is fitting that the currently stormin' Sunnis—quite likely equally mad—have chosen a name whose English-translation acronym designates a deity.

Isis is a goddess of Ancient Egypt, whose worship spread throughout the Greco-Roman world. She was worshiped as the ideal mother and wife as well as the patroness of nature and magic. She was the friend of the downtrodden, but she also listened to the prayers of the wealthy, maidens, aristocrats and rulers. Isis is also known as protector of the dead and goddess of children. The name Isis means "throne." Her headdress is a throne. As the personification of the throne, she was an important representation of the pharaoh's power. [Wikipedia]

Through those four letters of 'ISIS', the Sunni blitzkrieg has, willy-nilly, sent us a signal. Gods are in the mix in the chaos in the Middle East. Deep down it's a conflict between worshipers of deities. [Yes, ISIS advocates aren't promoting Isis. She didn't make it into the Quran. She's a no-no there, for sure. Furthermore, the 'ISIS' acronym stems from just one possible English translation of the Arabic name that the group chose for itself.] The conflicting theologies are not just the Muslim theologies of the Sunni and Shia. Deeply in the mix, (vortexed in the mix?) are the Babel-benighted brains of so many in the once "Christian" West. "So it would take God to solve this one? Okay, let's do it."

Can we not see the handwriting on the wall? We are creatures; therefore we are not god-enough to solve the Middle East

conflict. It may be that true God is “solving” his own problem with Islam. Feisty Old Testament prophets said that sort of thing when God “solved” the problem of faith-less Israel by calling in the Assyrians and then the Babylonians as the “rod of my anger.” And then he “solved” the Babylonian problem by sending in Cyrus of Persia, who even gets the title “messiah” in the Hebrew scriptures.

And is God “solving” our Westerners’ problem by making our helplessness “perfectly clear”?

“You are not god. So if you don’t stop pretending that you are, I’ll do it for you. Remember my mysterious hand writing these words on the wall of Belshazzar’s palace [in Babylon! just a short stretch from present-day Baghdad]. The words were: *Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharsin*. You have been weighed and found wanting.”

Playing God is not simply playing with fire. It’s Russian roulette with all the pistol chambers loaded.

So what to do? Just nothing? No. Well, first of all, do nothing based on those self-assumed “omni-” terms. That already signals a turnaround. But then do something unthinkable. Clean contrary.

The Biblical word is ‘repent’.

That was Luther’s own proposal back there with Suleiman on the scene. Yes, to solve the political threat of 600k soldiers at the gates of Vienna. That Luther topic has shown up more than once in past Thursday Theology postings. Google “Luther/Suleiman” on the internal search system on the Crossings homepage for the data. E.g., the opening paragraphs of <https://crossings.org/thursday/1998/thur0625.shtml> .

And for the idea of a whole nation repenting, there’s also stuff on the website. Google “Lincoln/repentance” to see how he did it

150 years ago. Classic is the post by Crossings president Steve Kuhl: <<https://crossings.org/thursday/2001/thur1018.shtml>>

Repentance is not the whole ball of wax, of course, in Christian theology. Repentance and faith constitute the full ellipse. But without the former, the latter can't happen. These Crossings past posts link the two. Check 'em out.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Response to Jungkuntz homily

Last week we sent you [a homily on the question of Christian obedience](#) by Richard Jungkuntz, who served as provost at Pacific Lutheran University. This week, as promised, we bring you an analysis of that homily by Robert C. Schultz. Bob is former ELCA pastor and an active member of the Crossings community whose doctorate was on the role of law and gospel in Lutheran theological history of the nineteenth century. In this commentary, Bob digs thoughtfully into the questions that Jungkuntz asks in his homily and the audience-based context in which those questions are asked and answered. We think you'll benefit from his insights.

Peace and Joy,

Carol Braun, for the editorial team

Rich Jungkuntz once again brings a thought-provoking piece from his father's files. Some of my thoughts as I read it and my

reflections on its uniqueness follow.

1. This homily offers rich potential for analysis and discussion. I have found it to be very thought-provoking for a number of reasons. Among these are the following:
 - a. The text of the homily is a passage from John 8 that is—in its original context and in terms of its content as distinguished in Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession—law and certainly not gospel. On my list of favorite texts, it ranks far below even “Alexander the coppersmith has done me much evil!” At least on first impression, it seems that Jesus is sharply condemning his hearers. The text seems to appear in the homily as the basis for an illustration of “hearing.” Would the homily be different if the text described “hearers” in some other way?
 - b. The author explicitly relates this homily to his understanding of law and gospel.
 - c. A major content of the homily is an explicit discussion of its underlying basis in systematic and hermeneutical theology and its corresponding assumptions.
2. The homily is addressed to a very specific and limited audience with unique characteristics: Lutheran college students who are almost all between eighteen and twenty-two years old and living in a very competitive environment that emphasizes success and failure. These students may bring with them a common liturgical and educational experience in a specific Lutheran tradition and are still attending chapel services. The homilist may safely assume

that background.

- a. The author focuses his analysis on the point at which the developmental needs of this audience are related to the illustration that he uses. I personally formulate my understanding of this in terms of Erik Erikson's scheme of epigenetic personal development. These students are in an extended adolescence in the course of which they repeat and reprocess developmental tasks of childhood in a variety of situations. They are finding new layers of their own personal identity. Others may have other frameworks for understanding this homily's audience, but it is, in my opinion, impossible to speak specifically about and hope to understand the author's presupposition without some such set of categories of personal development. In terms of Erikson's framework of the stages of personal development, the author assumes that the students are focused on developing their personal identity as individuals and as members of groups, and that they are engaged in recapitulating childhood at the stage of developing a favorable balance between autonomy and shame, which is before the stage of considering guilt versus initiative. (If the terminology is confusing, a glance at this Wikipedia entry may help: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erikson%27s_stage_s_of_psychosocial_development#Will:_Autonomy_vs._Shame_.26_Doubt_.28Muscular-Anal.2C_2-4_years.29.) Others may have a better way of understanding what is happening in college that is relevant to this homily. However we describe the situation of this audience, we must ask about the appropriateness of using an illustration from early childhood (learning

to walk) that is so far removed from the present experience of the audience ('audience' being, incidentally, another word with the stem "to hear").

- b. My understanding of the difference between guilt and shame is that guilt is defined by conformity to a standard based on content: It was wrong; I knew it was wrong; I wanted to do what I knew was wrong; and I did it. On the other hand, shame is more process-oriented: I wanted to do it; I did what I wanted to do; but what I actually did turned out differently than I intended; I may have learned that what I wanted is not what I really wanted; the outcome may not have met my own standards or somebody else's; it may have turned out differently than I wanted or hoped for when I did it; what I was trying to do may have been right but I did not do it well. I am not in control.
- c. Since the author is no longer with us, he must patiently endure both stupid and hopefully not-so-stupid questions and also tolerate our vicarious responses as well as their underlying presuppositions. For example, Suzy will probably often hear someone saying "C'mon, you can do it!" or some variation. Should she respond to all such invitations and imperatives in the same way? Few of us would want Suzy to respond positively every time. How will she know the difference? What makes the difference? How will she know? Can we assume that all the paraenesis she will encounter comes from trustworthy persons? How can she know that a particular preacher is trustworthy? Does the paraenesis become trustworthy because of the person from whom it comes or because of its content or something else or some combination of factors? For

the small child, learning to walk is predictably a satisfying and valuable experience. Unless physical handicaps make walking impossible, the child should be encouraged in learning to walk. Even when I fell as a child, I got up and tried again. Although Suzy will often be encouraged to do things that she may later wish she hadn't, in this case the encourager is someone who loves her and whom she loves and trusts. Although fathers are not always loving and trustworthy, the example used in this homily is clearly defined.

- d. Can we assume that God wills the good and that what God wants is good for all? God has reconciled himself to the world and all in it through Christ. God now wants us to be reconciled to him. The task of the preacher is not to reconcile God to his or her hearers but to reconcile his or her hearers to God.

Perhaps it will also be useful to consider another possible audience whose members are alcoholics and addicts. There are remarkable (and, so far as I know, still unresearched) examples of large groups overcoming addiction through the influence of pietistic Christian ministries. In our own country, however, the focus before the 1930s was largely on overcoming addiction in the confidence that this was God's will and that it required only the intense cooperation of the addict, who was often offered the alternative of kill or cure. Then, with the support of the Oxford Group—founded by a Lutheran pastor (Frank Buchman) and an Episcopalian priest (Sam Shoemaker)—Alcoholics Anonymous was born and incorporated its wisdom in “the twelve steps.” If we assume that God intends that addicts overcome their addiction and find healing, perhaps the first of these twelve steps offers an

interesting approach that is either more or less parallel to this homily. For reference, here are the twelve steps in the version provided by the Betty Ford Center:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

3. The homily explicitly intends to present the distinction between law and gospel. Given its purpose and its specific audience, we must ask whether it succeeds in this purpose. Some will miss terminology or explicit content traditional to that distinction. Perhaps some will find it inadequate in terms of the distinction between the content of the law and of the gospel in Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (although the distinction between law and gospel is not explicitly referred to in the Augsburg Confession itself) based on the assertion that all Scripture can be divided into law and gospel. Lutherans traditionally have followed the lead of this approach and have often assumed an Aristotelian focus on content that is focused on issues of guilt and forgiveness of sins. In contrast, there is, in my opinion, an equally Lutheran, equally acceptable approach, a tradition shaped by rejection of Aristotelian categories that defines the experiences of law and gospel in a variety of ways. This approach surfaces in Article V of the Formula of Concord when it uses the common reservoir of theological terms to define and to distinguish law and gospel in terms of their end effect of generating either mistrust or trust of God. But then, as Robert Preus has pointed out, the Formula of Concord in its entirety and in all its parts has had sometimes little, sometimes no influence on the development of Lutheran theology. [1] I would add the same about later Lutheran theology with notable exceptions such as, but not limited to, C.F.W. Walther in the nineteenth and Werner Elert in the twentieth century. [Note 1: Articles V and VI of the Formula of Concord, which belong together, had little influence upon later Lutheran orthodoxy, although the dogmaticians treated the subjects of the proper distinction between law and gospel and the Third Use of the law." "Influence of the Formula of

Concord on the Later Lutheran Orthodoxy." An essay in *Discord, Dialogue, and Concord*, ed. L. Spitz. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977, p. 93. <http://www.christforus.org/Papers/Content/Influence%20of%20the%20Formula%20of%20Concord%20on%20Later%20Lutheran%20Orthodoxy.pdf>.]

It seems to me—and I assume this in the following discussion—that answers can only be understood in terms of the questions to which they respond, and that there is no exclusively right way to ask the questions or respond to them. The way in which we ask our questions, whether Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, Nominalist, rationalistic-scholastic, Enlightened, Newtonian, Einsteinian, existential, ontological, etc., will determine the way in which we formulate our answers and determine the nature of the answers that we consider relevant, even if we do not necessarily think them as correct answers to other kinds of questions.

Years of dialogue have taught me that it is more important to understand the question than to have a formulaic answer valid for all questions. It has also taught me that a very good sermon in one situation is totally inappropriate in another. Unlike systematic theology which defines its own content and the questions that it asks, the preacher needs to hear, to clarify, and to respond to the questions asked by the audience and to respond to those questions with the gospel. As I think back over my experiences as preacher to a variety of audiences including middle-class suburban families, people in nursing homes, adolescent college students, enlisted or drafted military, mentally ill people with some hope of recovery, mentally ill people warehoused as too ill to treat with no hope of recovery, or residents of a maximum security prison for the

criminally insane, etc., I have delivered more than my allotted share of totally irrelevant and contextually meaningless sermons. [2] When I feel a little manic and need a little depression to stay in touch with reality, I go back and read an old sermon manuscript or two. Most painful is the awareness that a specific sermon responded to my questions rather than those in or close to the consciousness of my audience. Does this homily ask and answer questions that its specific audience may have been asking? Obviously, I do not have the information to answer that question. And because audiences who hear sermons from a preacher whom they know commonly add missing material and make corrections, they hear better sermons than those actually preached. In contrast, preachers reading or hearing someone else's sermon hear the content of the same sermon quite differently.

[Note 2: I have found a little volume of sermons very stimulating to my own reflection in perplexing homiletical situations. *Sermons from Hell: Help for the Distressed*, Ward A. Knights, Jr., ed. (St. Louis, Missouri, Bethany Press, 1975).]

Given those caveats, I would like to have the opportunity to discuss with the author the formulations of his questions and of his answers.

In the last paragraph of the homily, Jungkuntz—speaking to a specific audience—raises four such defining questions:

1) And what about us?

This question applies the question asked at that conference of theologians and reported in the second paragraph of the homily to the PLU chapel audience:

...the question being considered at that conference was whether such New Testament injunctions are in fact commandments in the sense of divine Law, or whether they are really just another form of the gracious Gospel, by which we learn that our sins are forgiven and that in Christ Jesus we are freed from the dictates and condemnations of God's holy Law.

I could only respond to this question by clarifying the terminology. This clearly did not happen in the meeting of theologians at which Dr. B presented his views. Until the sixteenth century, law was simply the Old Testament and gospel was the New Testament. This was a clear content distinction but it was confusing when Lutherans began to use law and gospel in a new sense. Lutherans therefore had to explain their new perspective and define their new usage of the terms 'law' and 'gospel'. The Apology presents it as a distinction in terms of content. However, as this distinction was applied in pastoral work, there was a growing awareness of the inadequacy of definitions in terms of content and an increasing awareness of process that made simple distinctions on the basis of gospel unsatisfying. This is reflected in Article V of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord as it attempts to merge definitions based on content with the realities of the processes of pastoral care. These discussions were further complicated by Calvin's focus on the threefold use of the law. (See <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.iv.viii.html>.) As Robert Preus has pointed out, the Formula of Concord had little influence on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Lutheranism that reduced the distinction between law and gospel to a sub-issue under the means of grace. When nineteenth-century Lutherans attempted to reconnect

with early Lutheran theology, they reencountered the issues discussed in Articles V and VI of the Formula of Concord. This is not the place to review the confused discussions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is enough to say here that although Lutherans will ordinarily not deny a distinction between law and gospel, they define it in widely differing ways. The inability of those eighty theologians to agree and perhaps even to understand one another, and Jungkuntz's summary description of the conversation, do not contribute to clarity. For example, it is difficult for me to understand how I would "learn that my sins are forgiven" from "such New Testament injunctions" as paraenesis and ethical admonitions. Again, I think that we need to have a discussion of process.

2) What do we hear when we read in the Holy Scriptures those exhortations and imperatives to do thus and so, to be this or that?

The question is asked only in reference to exhortations and imperatives that I read in the Holy Scriptures. Only a very few of these are directly relative to my life situation. So my first question to the author would be whether he is referring only to that small list or whether he is also referring to the myriad analogies that various preachers may use in their attempt to draw many analogies to modern life. The analogy to Suzy's first efforts to walk provoke almost no question except whether she is expected to walk too soon and whether it really is important that she crawl for some appropriate length of time before she is encouraged to walk. I would suspect that most of the behavior questions being faced by even those PLU students would be somewhat more complex and a correct answer much less certain. We today, in any case,

live in a culture in the midst of a massive ethical revolution in which there are no longer any generally accepted standards and in which the Bible and the churches no longer play any significant role in determining, communicating, and maintaining those standards. Paul Althaus once wrote,

This guidance by the Holy Spirit implies that God's concrete commanding cannot be read off from a written document, an inherited scheme of law. I must learn afresh every day what God wants of me. For God's commanding has a special character for each individual: it is always contemporary, always new. God commands me (and each person) in a particular way, in a different way than He commands others.... The living and spiritual character of the knowledge of what God requires of men in the present moment must not be destroyed by rules and regulations.[Paul Althaus, *The Divine Command: a New Perspective on Law and Gospel*. Translated by Franklin Sherman. (Philadelphia: [Fortress Press](#). 1966, pp. 43 and 45). I was looking for the translation of this on the web and came across the quotation on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_and_Gospel. (Retrieved June, 2014). Does anyone know the author? (Appears not to be a Lutheran since the Apology is attributed to Luther.)]

3) On what wavelength do we tune in?

This question is a creative contribution to the discussion of the process by which law and gospel are distinguished. The Apology's division of the Scripture into two categories was a division on the basis of content. No matter how useful it is, there are problems. Luther

himself reports that he once heard the gospel when the monk (probably Staupitz?) to whom he was confessing his inability to trust in God reminded him that God commands Luther and all of us to trust in God. The authors of the Formula of Concord document their own experience that the communication of content of the gospel in its narrow sense can result in unfaith. I expect that more than one of us can validate that from our own experience. The Augustana surprisingly says nothing about the distinction between law and gospel but does assert that the Holy Spirit works when and where He wills. We as preachers are often surprised by our experience of that fact in practice. Jungkuntz appears to suggest that at least one way in which content (in this case, what appears to be law) can be described in practice is as the "wavelength" over which it is transmitted or to which our receiver is tuned. It would be interesting to know if Jungkuntz developed this concept further elsewhere.

4) Do we hear Law or Gospel?

Without assuming your answer, I can only ask, What do you hear? I think I hear gospel. This approach seems to me to be rooted in Luther's basic rejection of the Aristotelian presuppositions of Neoplatonism or Scholasticism. Lutherans have not always agreed with Luther at that point and have constantly reshaped Luther's insights to be relevant to their own way of thinking. This approach also seems to me to be in the tradition of Walther's lectures on law and gospel. While errors have much in common, the truth of the gospel is expressed best in terms that respond directly to the situation of the hearer. In pastoral care, process is more important than content. I think this homily is an excellent example of that approach.

Whatever we hear, this homily was not written for us. We are eavesdroppers on a conversation between the provost and those students attending chapel on that day—and we know enough about being both students and preachers ourselves that we can make some intelligent guesses about the dynamics of that congregation.

How might this homily have intersected with the students' experience? We all know what it's like to be a college student. Even before you can pay the tuition, you have to be admitted. To be admitted to a school that acts responsibly in relation to its students, i.e. not a for-profit school, you have to prove not merely that you want to be a college student and are able to pay the tuition but that you can learn and are ready to learn what the college has to teach. Entering college has a great deal of similarity to Suzy's learning to walk. The father wants Suzy to walk and is quite accepting of her stumbling awkward movements. He will accept quite inadequate performance. The college will not (and should not) accept performance that is not up to standard, and by admitting the student it says, "Come join us; you can do it." Since it is not God, the college may be wrong. But God never asks anything more of us than we are able to do. By the standard expected under the gospel, everyone is doing the best he or she can. It may not be good enough for the college but it is good enough for God. That Christian freedom to be what I am liberates me from the performance-reducing effect of not being good enough.

Individual freshmen may be discovering that they were admitted by mistake. Other students who were academic, athletic, and social stars in their local high schools now find themselves competing in quite a different arena and find themselves somewhere in this college's average group.

Maybe not good enough to get a scholarship renewed but good enough for God. If a freshman survives that first year, things may get worse, and producing acceptable work may get even more difficult. Sophomores and juniors, as well as seniors now ready to graduate, encounter constantly increasing demands and higher standards until they find that they have reached the level of doing the best they can. The faculty should have high standards for all students. That's the reality of the law in the narrow sense. Evaluation requires a normal curve at every level with some outliers at each end of the distribution, some A's and some D's and, if the admissions department has made some mistakes, some F's. The A's and high B's who go on to graduate school will almost all also eventually find themselves at the lower end of a new distribution. That's the reality of life in this world, life under the law, a reality that none of us escapes.

As provost of the university, Jungkuntz represents that reality. As homilist in the chapel, he speaks not as an official of the academic community but on behalf of God and asserts that God has reconciled himself to us not in terms of what others expect of us or even of what we think or wish we were able to do but in terms of who and what we are at this moment. We may be flunking out, unable to get a date, unable to be admitted to graduate school and unable to afford to try to buy our way in, but good enough for God. We are free to do the best we can at this time and in this place and know that although it is not good enough for others and perhaps even not good enough to meet our own standards, we are acceptable to God.

Jungkuntz summarized it all so neatly in that last paragraph. Perhaps too neatly to be unpacked by some students. But I have found my encounter with it an

occasion for more intense theological reflection than I expected when I first began this response.

robertcschultzATgmailDOTcom

June 28, 2014

On Christian Obedience: A Homiletical “Aha!”

Colleagues,

Many of us will be bumping into the word ‘obedience’ this Sunday. It’s featured heavily in the section of Romans 6 that the Revised Common Lectionary designates as the day’s Second Reading (Year A, Proper 8). Whether it also shows up in the sermons we preach or listen to will depend on the preacher’s willingness to tackle the topic. And yes, ‘tackle’ is the appropriate verb here. Obedience is not high on the list of favorite concepts in the wider culture that shapes us these days; and if the preacher is a Lutheran, then there’s that pesky business that our thinkers have been squabbling over since the sixteenth century, a set of questions packaged under the rubric, “Third Use of the Law.” Question One: is there such a use, or is there not? Or, in terms that plain people might employ, do the Ten Commandments have a positive role to play in the conversation that ensues when Jesus-trusters start sorting out what to do with their trust? More sharply, do they define the “new obedience” that our trust in Christ gives rise to? Werner Elert said no. His student, Ed Schroeder, has echoed that ‘no’ consistently over the decades. Even so, heads have bumped over

“third use” in the brief history of our own Crossings Community. Take that as a sign of how stubborn a question this is.

Fiercer by far was the head-bumping that happened in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod of the sixties and seventies, “third use” being but one of the issues in contention, and a derivative one at that. Still, it came up, and fairly frequently, with epithets of “legalist” and “antinomian” being hurled back and forth between contenders. Among those caught in the tumult of the day was one Richard Jungkuntz. (I write it that way for those of you who haven’t heard of him.) Jungkuntz taught New Testament at Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, now located in Fort Wayne. He was also the first executive secretary of the Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations. The 1969 election of Jacob A. O. Preus as president of the LCMS led speedily to his dismissal from both posts. He continued his career as provost at the American Lutheran Church’s Pacific Lutheran University, where he also served a brief stint as interim president. We’re pleased at Crossings to count his son, Rich, as a member of the community. If you’ve followed Thursday Theology these past few years, you’ll recall his occasional contributions, dispatched from the northeastern corner of Thailand that he presently calls home.

Rich recently transcribed a handwritten manuscript of one of his father’s chapel homilies at PLU. We caught wind of this and asked for permission to pass it along. The piece is striking in its serendipity. For one thing, it speaks directly to the question of the Christian’s “obedience,” and what that entails. For another, we had just been looking at another sharp piece on the same topic, for which permission to publish could not be gotten. Jungkuntz approaches the matter from a somewhat different angle; even so, the essential point gets driven home, and very effectively. You’ll want to consider this now as a touchstone for the usefulness of what you’ll hear or hope to say

when Sunday gets here.

And there's an added benefit. Next week we'll send you an analysis of the homily by Robert C. Schultz. Bob is a friend of Rich, and recalls Rich's father as a respected colleague. We think you'll appreciate his insights.

Peace and Joy,
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

+ In Nomine Iesu +

LBW 423

"Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God." John 8:47 (RSV)

About fifteen years or so ago I attended a faculty meeting I'll never forget. Actually, it was a joint faculty conference involving some eighty theological professors from two Lutheran seminaries. One of the major presentations at that conference was given by a New Testament scholar on the topic, "The Pauline Paraenesis." Paraenesis is not some kind of disease, but just an old Greek word meaning exhortation. For instance, a typical Pauline paraenesis or exhortation would be a passage like this from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (4:4-6).

Now you notice that all the verbs in this exhortation are in the imperative mode, the mode of command. Well, the question being considered at that conference was whether such New Testament injunctions are in fact commandments in the sense of divine Law, or whether they are really just another form of the gracious

Gospel, by which we learn that our sins are forgiven and that in Christ Jesus we are freed from the dictates and condemnations of God's holy Law. And it was this latter interpretation that the New Testament scholar was eloquently arguing for in his presentation.

When he finished, there was of course a vigorous discussion, with many penetrating questions being asked—all of which the presenter patiently and persuasively answered. Until at last one beady-eyed professor from the other seminary arose and said in severe and abrasive tones, "But listen here, Dr. B, it's obvious that you are completely wrong and in grievous error; after all, there have to be some moral absolutes in the Christian religion!" To which the essayist responded, "Like what, for instance?" "Like the Decalogue of Moses, sir, the Ten Commandments!" snapped back the critic. After a split-second of silence the essayist dismissed his critic's retort with a casual shrug, as he said, "Aw, shucks—not those dinky commandments?"

Well, that ended the discussion, I can tell you. For the conference immediately broke up in an uproar, with half of the professors shouting: "Heresy, heresy!" and the other half weakly claiming that maybe the essayist hadn't really meant what everyone had heard him say. This morning, however, I want to tell you, before God, that the essayist was really right; and, if I can, I'd like to try at least to explain why it's important for us to understand both what he meant and how it matters to us.

Let me begin with a little foreign language lesson (non-credit, pass/fail). But first I want to suggest that you think of some commandment of God, or your parents, or your teacher, or your boss on a summer job, or your drill sergeant—and ask yourself what English word, verb or noun, declares the kind of response the giver of the commandment expects from you. It's the verb

‘obey’ isn’t it? And the noun is ‘obedience’.

Now here comes the foreign language lesson. In Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written, the words we translate with ‘obey’ and ‘obedience’ are υπακούω [hip-ah-koo-oh] and υπακοή [hip-ah-ko-ay]. “So what?” you say. Well, this is what: both those words come directly from the Greek verb meaning “to hear” (ακούω [ah-koo-oh]). So when you read in your New Testament the English translation ‘obey’ or ‘obedience’, you really should think, not about capitulating to the will of someone who has enforcement power over you, but rather about “hearing” and what that implies.

Now, that isn’t just a fluke of the Greek language. For when the New Testament was translated into Latin by St. Jerome, the words he used for υπακούω and υπακοή were ‘oebodio’ and ‘oebodientia’, the very words from which we’ve derived our English ‘obey’ and ‘obedience’. And you know what? Those two Latin words are directly from the Latin verb ‘audio’, which means “to hear” (compare ‘audience’). But this little language lesson gets stranger still. For when Luther translated the New Testament into German, the word he used for obedience (Greek υπακοή) was ‘Gehorsamkeit’. And can you guess what ‘Gehorsamkeit’ is derived from? You’re right! It’s derived from the German word meaning “to hear,” viz. ‘hören’. And just by the way, my good friend, Professor Toven, tells me that in Norwegian the word for obedience is ‘adlydelse’, which really means “hearing,” or “paying attention to the sound of something.”

But what about the Old Testament? Well, it’s a funny thing in a way, but you won’t find the words ‘obey’ or ‘obedience’ anywhere in the whole Old Testament. Instead, when your English Bible uses these words (which, of course it does), the original Hebrew has the word שמע [she-mah], or a derivative of שמע, which means—you guessed it!—“to hear.”

Now what are we to make of all this? What we make of it is whether we're Christian, or not; whether we are the lambs and sheep of the flock of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, or not. For "the sheep hear [their shepherd's] voice," as Jesus says in St. John's Gospel, "and He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (10:3).

By our Baptism in Jesus' name, the heavenly Father has made you and me his very own. And that's why in our text Jesus can say, "He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

Okay, but what does that have to do with commandments and exhortations and injunctions? Just this. Do you remember when your little sister or brother had not yet learned to walk, and was just beginning to stand upright by holding on to the edge of a chair? And what did your dad do? He knelt on the floor just a foot or two away with his arms outstretched and said, "Come, Suzy, come here; c'mon, you can do it!"

Did you notice that verb form? It was imperative, the form of a commandment: "Come!" But how did dad's voice *sound* to Suzy when she *heard* it? Like a commandment, an order, an injunction to obey, or else? No way. What it sounded like, and what she heard, was a gracious tender invitation—and more than that. What she heard in that loving voice was the strong assurance that she really had the strength and power to do what she never realized she could do. And so she "obeyed." Empowered by the love she could hear in her father's voice, she tottered forward into his arms. She learned how to walk.

And what about us? What do we hear when we read in the Holy Scriptures those exhortations and imperatives to *do* thus and so, to *be* this or that? On what wavelength do we tune in? Do we hear Law or Gospel? As the sheep and lambs whom the Good Shepherd has

called by name in our Baptism, surely we hear only Gospel, only the tender and loving voice of God, letting us know again and again what wonderful things His forgiveness for Jesus' sake now enables and empowers us to do.

Jesus and Evolution? Seriously! (A Book Review)

Today we bring you another book review, this time by my fellow Thursday Theology editor, Jerry Burce. Jerry reviews George L. Murphy's *Models of Atonement*, a slim paperback that takes a meaty theological approach the question of how Christian confessors can speak effectively about salvation in a scientific world.

Jerry's review is compelling; I, for one, plan to get my hands on a copy of Murphy's book as soon as I'm able.

Peace and Joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

MODELS OF ATONEMENT: *Speaking about salvation in a scientific world*

By George L. Murphy.

Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2013.

145 pages, paperback, \$18.00.

I suppose George L. Murphy knows as little about Crossings as Crossings knows about George L. Murphy. According to Google,

there's nary a mention of him at crossings.org. My first thought on finishing this little book is that we ought to get acquainted as fellow servants of the Word. For one thing, we share a couple of key passions. For another, Crossings could learn from Murphy, and Murphy, I think, from Crossings.

Let's start with shared passions. One of these is theological intelligibility, or, in Murphy's plainer terms, getting "the message we proclaim to make sense to people" (58). Another is the message itself, or, more sharply, the message of messages. A less precise writer would call this "the Gospel" and let it go at that. Murphy doesn't settle for code words. Here as elsewhere he spells out what he means, in this case reaching for St. Paul, who puts it better than anyone. So the message that needs to make sense is "the proclamation of the good news that Jesus 'was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification' (Romans 4:25)," this proclamation being so important that "all theological work should in some way support and encourage it" (110). Thus Murphy. I can't be the only Crossings insider who, on reading that, will think immediately of Robert W. Bertram's insistence that "the systematician's task is to 'necessitate' Christ" ("[On the Nature of Systematic Theology](#)").

So who is George Murphy? Quick answer: a retired ELCA pastor with an M.Div. from Wartburg and a prior Ph.D. in physics that he earned at Johns Hopkins. Thursday Theology readers who follow discussions about the intersection of faith and science are likely to recognize his name, since he's been publishing in that area for over three decades. This is his sixth book. His essays and articles have been many more, at least [three of them](#) appearing in *The Lutheran*. The erstwhile *Lutheran Partners*, a publication for ELCA professionals, featured him often. Those essays are presently lodged in the [Faith and Science](#) corner of the ELCA's website. Does anyone read them? Well, yes. As

Crossings ancients and their colleagues learned in the LCMS context of the sixties and seventies, the surest sign that you have an audience is noise from those who fear and loathe you. By that measure, Murphy is clearly a known entity. On Googling his name you'll speedily reach an [unfriendly website](#) devoted to "creation science," where he's described as a "theistic evolutionist." (That's like Herman Otten calling Ed Schroeder a Gospel reductionist, a note I toss in with apologies to those who don't know that history.) Were Murphy to deign a response—though hints in the present book have me doubting such a thing—he would surely retort that he's a theologian of the cross who refuses to bury his head in the sand where real science is concerned. Otherwise one misrepresents the works of God. Worse, one closes off communication with a host of people for whom Christ died. That (I add) would include Charles M. Blow of *The New York Times*, and anyone in the past week who read his June 8 [tirade about Biblical literalists](#) with sympathy and applause.

This latter is the audience that Murphy thinks and writes for, if not directly, then by challenging his fellow theologians, pastors, and co-confessors—that would certainly include the Crossings community—to get serious about science as the way that thoughtful people appropriately understand the universe we live in and our evolutionary origins within it. And if we're to proclaim Christ crucified in today's world, then it's against this backdrop that we need to think Christ through.

This is the goal Murphy sets for himself in the present book. As he puts it in his introductory chapter, his aim is to formulate "an understanding of the work of Christ that is grounded in Scripture, retains some continuity with the theological tradition, takes seriously today's scientific picture of the world, and uses language that makes contact with that picture" (16). This final verb is key: "makes contact." That's the least

a serious proclaimer of God's Gospel has got to do. It's also the most that she or he is able to do, as Murphy plainly grasps. Parenthetically, one of the deep pleasures of reading him, especially in today's mainline theological milieu, is to find oneself in conversation with somebody else who pays assiduous attention to his Scriptural and confessional traditions, which, in the present case, leaves you knowing that he also knows how faith in the God of the Gospel is always and only a gift of the Holy Spirit, this being as true in the hallways of Murphy's Johns Hopkins physics department as it once was in the Areopagus of St. Paul's Athens (Acts 17). The proclaimer's aim in either venue is simply to make contact. One has to speak the lingo, to identify and work with the existing assumptions of the audience one is trying to engage. To do that is God's style, as Murphy will underscore in one of his more intriguing arguments. He takes it for granted that serious servants and operatives of Christ will make it their style too. I'm sure he'd arch an eyebrow over the failure of the little band of Crossings writers to pay much attention over the years to the topic of evolution. How, he might ask, can you hope to necessitate Christ for hearers today if you don't dig into that?

In any case, that's what Murphy does. He digs. He formulates. He keeps his feet firmly planted on Scriptural turf and stays in impressively far-ranging and respectful conversation with the wider theological tradition, even as he sticks his neck out at key points to revise that tradition, such revision being required, in his view, by the realities science brings to light. He also knows and serves a greater light—indeed, “the Light of the world.” From start to finish he keeps his hands gripped firmly on the cross of Christ as the essential portal to “a unified picture of divine action in the world *and* of divine purpose for the world that takes science seriously” (33).

I will not try here to rehearse or sketch the many moves Murphy

makes. It would run to more pages than you'd care to cover in a review, and, in any case, Murphy has done that himself. His preface points us to a summary of his basic ideas in an online essay entitled "[Human Evolution in Theological Context](#)." You'll want to read it. It will whet your appetite for the expansion the book provides. What I'll give you in the meantime is a pre-appetizer of sorts, a little headline-style list of things that most grabbed my attention as I went along:

1. Evolution. Face up to it. It's God's way of doing God's creative work.
2. Death. It's essential to the evolutionary process. There can't have been a time when death was not.
3. Humankind. Yes, it emerged from a pre-human ancestral tree. There cannot have been one Adam, one Eve.
4. The first humans in a theological sense: "hominids in whom reason, self-awareness, and communication had developed to an extent that it was possible for them to be aware of God's address to them" (63).
5. The model human? No, not a pre-lapsed Adam, but rather Christ. And that's according to the Scriptures.
6. Sin. Luther nailed it: failure to fear, love, and trust God.
7. Sin's effect. Turns "good death" into evil death, the former leading to God, the other not.
8. The Genesis creation accounts. Examples of God's "kenotic" communication style, the Holy Spirit deliberately confining God's Word to the limits of human knowledge and understanding. Take it seriously today? As theological address, absolutely!
9. The work of Christ (1). To enmesh God's self, via cross, as fellow sufferer and loser in the misery of the evolutionary process, and, via resurrection, to transform and redirect the process; to launch "a new creation."

10. The work of Christ (2). To enable atonement. Thereby to restore creation “by rescuing it from the hopelessness and ultimate annihilation of separation from God” (102).
11. Atonement. The at-one-ment that ensues when sinners trust God.
12. Classic atonement theorists. Anselm: off the mark, but deserving of more respect than he gets. Abelard: closer than Anselm, but still no cigar. His mistake? Emphasizing love instead of faith. (In Crossings lingo: attempting a direct jump from Step 4 to Step 6 without passing first through Step 5.)
13. Salvation. Creation made new. God achieving “something not included in our presently understood laws of physics” (118).

And there is more, much more. Some of it will startle in the way that certain of the items above have startled. The greater part will draw a Crossings-style reader into a renewed celebration of the astonishing gift of Christ crucified. Will the startling bits equip the Christian insider to help an outsider get excited about Christ too? That, finally, is Murphy’s aim. Whether he manages to meet it is something this reader is still thinking about. One point on which I’d press him is an assertion that “the particular language of justification, and especially the forensic understanding of it..., does not easily make contact with people who are imbued with a scientific understanding of the world” (105). I suspect that scientists continue to be as concerned as poets are about the evaluations they get; hence my suggestion at the beginning that a conversation between Murphy and some Crossings-minded types might be of mutual benefit.

What I don’t need to think about at all is whether Murphy is a genuine theologian that the rest of us are obliged to take seriously. Of that there’s no question. He passes the aforementioned Bertram sniff test, and does so with flying

colors. He “necessitates” Christ. I will draw this to a close by letting him do so in his own words, but first a quick prelude:

In addressing his central concern—an appropriate model of atonement; a way to speak of Christ’s work that “makes contact” with scientific assumptions about the world—Murphy draws heavily on Gerhard Forde’s insistence that atonement presented as an abstract proposition about some kind of God-and-Jesus transaction for the rest of us to believe, with eternal brownie points handed out to those who swallow firmly, is not worth talking about. Real atonement is an “actual event,” a reconciliation that “takes place between God and people in the real world” (92). The key to that reconciliation is trust in God’s promise of life. It falls to Christ to anchor and evoke this trust, while simultaneously exposing the folly of ultimate trust placed elsewhere. This is what happens in a crucifixion that is shown by its subsequent Easter to have been an execution of the Son of God.

Here I hand the baton to Murphy—

“Jesus died ‘for us’ because we had to get rid of him to preserve our systems and projects that were challenged by his life and words. Jesus Christ is what humanity was always intended to be, so humanity that has turned away from God and refuses to be what God intended killed him. That means that the cross is the destruction of humanity, the end of sinners. When we are brought to understand this, we realize that the idols upon which we depended and which motivated our behavior work death rather than life. They cannot be trusted. And when the objects of our deepest faith are seen to be lies, in a real sense we die.

“God has allowed us to kill our one real hope, the union of God with humanity, as the end of our self-chosen road. This alien

work is foreign to God's loving character, but it is work that must be done in order for true faith to be possible. Only if our false faith is shattered can we be brought to see that we cannot put our ultimate trust in ourselves or any other creature.

"And the cross-resurrection event is saving grace. When we are brought to see that our true creator was willing to die for us, indeed *did* die for us, and come back announcing peace, then we will be convinced that God is trustworthy 'above all things.' This is God's 'proper work,' bringing about true faith and reconciliation with the God who 'justifies the ungodly...gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist (Romans 4:5, 17). And when true faith arises, God's wrath comes to an end. We are, as Paul says, 'dead to sin and alive to God' (Romans 6:11)" (96).

I suggest that you get Murphy's book and spend some time with it.

Jerome Burce
Fairview Park, Ohio

Book Review: FROM THE OXUS RIVER TO THE CHINESE SHORES: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and

Central Asia

Today we're glad to bring you a new book review by Ed Schroeder, Crossings co-founder and original Thursday Theology blogger. This week Ed reviews a multi-author exploration of the history of Christianity in the East.

Peace and Joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

FROM THE OXUS RIVER TO THE CHINESE SHORES: *Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia*.

Li Tang & Dietmar W. Winkler, editors.

Vienna and Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013.

472 pages, paperback, \$69.95.

"How they brought the Good News from Jerusalem to Rome."

That was Archibald Hunter's title for his chapter on the Acts of the Apostles in his *Introducing the New Testament*, a textbook from my seminary days three score years ago. But there is no biblical book that tells us about the Gospel shower ("*Platzregen*," Luther called it, a moving thundershower) going east. Not just west to the capital of the Roman Empire, as we all know, but in the opposite direction: "How they brought the Good News from Jerusalem to Chang'an, the capital of the Chinese Empire." Which most of us don't know.

Granted, that *Platzregen* didn't get to China within the first century of the Christian era, and so such a report, "The Acts of the Apostles Thomas and Bartholomew," didn't make it into the New Testament canon. Probably none was ever written. But just as

Roman roads were the highway for the Gospel's move west, so the Silk Road was the avenue for the Gospel's traveling east. And that's a long road, 4,172 miles from Jerusalem to Chang'an. (FYI, Jerusalem to Rome is a mere 1,434 miles.)

We Western Christians are largely ignorant about the Syriac-speaking Church of the East—yes, the Church all the way to the Far East. So it was in my seminary education in the 1950s. And all to our own deficit, if for no other reason than that Syriac is a kindred-language to Aramaic, the language of Jesus and his disciples. The scholars writing the twenty-nine essays in this book are out to correct that defect.

But it was not Jerusalem, it was Antioch that became the sending center. In both directions. Already in the Book of Acts we hear, "It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians" (Acts 11:26). It was "the church in Antioch...[that] laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them off" (Acts 13). They went west. What we don't learn from the New Testament book of Acts is that it was from Antioch that the Gospel mission also went east. It was Antioch, at the western end of the Silk Road, where the "Church of the East" took off.

While Paul and Barnabas (and eventually Peter too?) "went west," others headed east. Thomas, Bartholomew (and a certain "Addai of the Seventy" designated alongside both of them as "apostle" by Christians in Babylon) got the Silk Road traffic going. It flourished. Syriac was the language of the faith.

So much so, that in that ancient imperial capital at the far eastern end of the Silk Road, Chang'an, now Xi'an ("she-an"), there is a stele commemorating the *Platzregen's* arrival there. (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate for 'stele': "an inscribed stone slab or pillar used for commemorative purposes.") It speaks of the "luminous religion" (*Jingjiao*) that arrived at the imperial

court in 635 A.D. when Syriac missionary Alopen presented the Christian Gospel to the emperor in that city.

Here are Wikipedia's specs: "The Nestorian Stele is a Tang Chinese stele erected in 781 that documents 150 years of early Christianity in China. It is a 279-cm-tall [that is, nine-foot-tall] limestone block with text in both Chinese and Syriac describing the existence of Christian communities in several cities in northern China. It reveals that the initial Christian church had met recognition by the Tang Emperor Taizong, due to efforts of the Christian missionary Alopen in 635. Buried in 845, probably during religious suppression, the stele was not rediscovered until 1625." (Wikipedia, "Nestorian Stele," accessed June 12, 2014. More on the label "Nestorian" below.)

(Incidentally, in 1992, eight of us Crossings folks, on our way to do a Crossings workshop in Beijing, made a side trip to Xi'an to see this stele. We brought back home a rubbing—yes, nine feet tall—for show-and-tell.)

This volume is a collection of papers presented at the Third International Conference on the "Church of the East in China and Central Asia," held in 2009 in Salzburg, Austria. The "Oxus River" in the title is at the midpoint of the Silk Road, touching today's Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan.

The papers deal with diverse topics arranged into four thematic groups: 1. Manuscripts and Inscriptions; 2. Historical Inquiry and Archaeological Excavations; 3. Syriac Christianity along the Silk Road; and 4. Liturgical Traditions and Theological Reflections.

In the first group, various scholars have undertaken studies on manuscripts and inscriptions unearthed in China and Central Asia.

The second group deals with the historical aspect of East Syriac Christianity, divided into two historical periods: The Tang (seventh- through tenth-century, the era of the stele) and the Mongol-Yuan (thirteenth- and fourteenth-century) dynasties.

Fascinating here are the various papers investigating the text of the stele itself. Here the rubrics of contemporary scholarship come into play, investigating not only the text of the stele, but also its context. For example, Max Deeg elaborates on the Syriac priest Yisi, the donor of the stele, who is telling the story, and interprets him against the political background of the Tang Dynasty, proposing that the content of the Xi'an inscription was political propaganda blended with religious rhetoric.

Group three looks at Christian communities along the Silk Road before it gets to China.

The final group, seven essays on theological and liturgical perspectives on East Syriac Christianity, was most fascinating for me. Several of them probe the difficulty in translating Christian proclamation—incarnation, trinity, faith—into the Buddhist-Confucian-saturated Chinese language. Ditto for the umpteen other languages encountered along that four-thousand-mile road. Major one being Sogdian, which I'd never heard of, but which I now know was the lingua franca all along that Silk Road.

This difficulty in translating is probed especially by Glen L. Thompson's chapter on "How the Jingjiao Became Nestorian: Western Perceptions and Eastern Realities." 'Jingjiao' is the Chinese term on the stele for the Christian faith, which translators have rendered as "luminous religion." The accuracy of the label 'Nestorian', linked to the stele ever since its discovery in the seventeenth century, is challenged by Thompson.

He examines how the term 'Nestorian', already in the days of Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople in the fifth century, slipped into Christian vocabulary as the generic epithet for anyone allegedly departing from orthodoxy.

Nestorius himself, a major voice in Antiochene (= Syriac) Christianity, lost in one of the major controversies of early church history. His opponent was Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria. Patriarch contra patriarch. What triggered the debate, of all things, was dissent about appropriate titles for the Virgin Mary. Cyril said "*theotokos*," Mother of God. Nestorius said "*Christotokos*," Mother of the Messiah. Cyril ("out to win at any cost," so one of my teachers) brought Nestorius down. He even succeeded in getting Emperor Theodosius II to ban Nestorius (for life, without parole) to the Egyptian desert, where, after sixteen years, he died in misery.

Church politics and imperial politics—then and now—work on the same paradigm. The one at the top of the pyramid calls the shots. This all in contradiction to the primal mandate of the Church's Head in that discussion (Matt. 20) with his disciples about authority (triggered by their own lust for top positions): "It shall not be so among you."

So 'Nestorian' became a dirty word in Christian vocabulary, regardless of whether or not the item so labeled came close to Nestorius's own teaching. Let alone whether Nestorius really was a threat to the free flow of the Gospel.

Thompson reflects on how this "Western perception," a negative perception, colored the "Eastern realities" of the Syriac church that came to be in China. With massive documentation, he chronicles the history of 'Nestorian' as a pejorative term. Thus, "while the Church of the East itself preferred other terms, they never could shake this one. And the explorers and

writers of the early modern period naturally adopted the same terminology for the new documents and archeological discoveries of the Jingjiao. It remains to be seen whether a less emotive term, and one with more accurate connotations, will ever be successfully introduced and thus allow the Chinese Jingjiao movement to be judged on its own merits" (435).

On the side, I can still hear my own teacher, Werner Elert (Erlangen University, 1953), telling us "*Nestorius war kein Ketzer.*" Nestorius was no heretic. He was the victim of church politics. 'Martyr' might be a better word for him—both in its original meaning as a witness, and then as one who dies on the witness stand.

But that's a subject for another report.

Some of the essays also touch on the demise of these Christian communities in the Church of the East as persecution came when new emperors ascended the throne in China, and also when the Mongol invasion swept west from the Far East. Perhaps that will be a topic for some future conference of these researchers.

This book is truly an ecumenical, international product. Half of the authors come from middle or east Asia. The names of the editors, Li Tang and Dietmar W. Winkler, already signal its international pedigree. Both editors are connected with the Mayr-Meinhof Institute for Eastern Christian Studies in Salzburg.

Syriac Christianity spread along the Silk Road together with Aramaic culture and liturgy. The staging posts of Christian merchants along the trade routes grew into first missionary centers. Thus, the mission of the Church of the East stretched from Persia to Arabia and India; and from the Oxus River in central Asia to the Chinese shores. What we receive in this volume are studies on the Church of the East in its historical

setting. Contributors have shed new light on this subject from various perspectives and academic disciplines, providing fresh insights into the rich heritage of Syriac Christianity. For this reviewer it was a journey into a new and unknown world.

Edward H. Schroeder
St. Louis, Missouri
June 4, 2014

Book Review: DON'T KILL THE MESSENGER! by Donald Ray Soeken

It was a sad day when I first realized that whistleblower protection programs are necessary things, not only in a few corrupt institutions but in institutions everywhere, and that something bad in our nature wins out, time and time again, over our collective sense of fairness and justice when it comes to dealing with people who expose the truth of an institution's failings. But we're forced to face this fact—even, for example, when watching tonight's evening news: for I have to think that the fear of whistleblower retribution had something to do with those reports of faulty ignition switches not making their way up to the higher administration at GM.

Today we're very happy to bring you a book review on the topic of whistleblowing and truth telling by a man who needs no introduction: Ed Schroeder, Crossings co-founder and original proprietor of Thursday Theology.

Peace and Joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

DON'T KILL THE MESSENGER! *How America's Valiant Whistleblowers Risk Everything in Order to Speak Out Against Waste, Fraud and Abuse in Business and Government.*

By Donald Ray Soeken.

North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014.

196 pages, paperback, \$15.00

Reviewed by Edward H. Schroeder.

The subtitle tells all. Nine chapters, nine case studies, of whistleblowers who have been Soeken's clients (or is it patients?) as little Davids tangling with mega-Goliaths, about the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth.

Theologically speaking, Soeken's nine case studies confirm what Jaroslav Pelikan (my teacher sixty-five years ago) said his Slovak grandmother told him (sic!) was the "indelible character of original sin." Soeken exposes not just the "sins" of waste, fraud and abuse in business and government, but the "original sin," that primordial bent in humans to bend everything they can lay their hands on to promote their own perceived advantage. In these nine cases we see that "bent" swinging into action by those exposed when the whistle blows, swinging into action to save themselves by destroying the whistleblower.

In the Reformation era, Philip Melanchthon used the Latin term '*inclinatio*' when discussing original sin to pinpoint the primal, the original, "shape" of sinners (before they engage in any actions). The shape of sinners is like an inclined plane, he

said, where everything that surfaces out from me always rolls in the same direction—to my perceived advantage and to aid and abet my agendas.

That principle shows up to the nines in these nine case studies. With their wickedness exposed, folks retaliate by exposing this *inclinatio*, rolling every stone they can get their hands on down the inclined plane to destroy the whistleblower. In most of Soeken's nine chapters, they succeed in "killing" the messengers (even though they are still breathing), because a messenger's message, the plain truth, is a fearful truth that has to be killed if they are to survive. Kill the messenger and the message will be killed too.

It's always David and Goliath whom we meet in these standoffs, one person and some juggernaut—military contractor, the federal government, even the U.S. Marine Corps and the Library of Congress. (Yes, also the NSA—long before Snowden.) Of course, the juggernauts all have human faces. It's seldom a faceless bureaucracy that the whistleblowers encounter, but rather the real faces of real people within the bureaucracy, who are in positions of power and perpetrating hanky-panky. They all have faces and names. And to save face, they roll down the stones on the whistleblowers, Goliath-sized boulders compared to David's pebbles in the hands of the truth tellers.

Rarely in Soeken's nine cases does the pebble-slinger come out on top. One did survive:

"Unlike most whistleblowers, Franz Gayl had beaten the odds. Described throughout the national news media as a 'hero' who'd risked his career in order to tell the truth about abuses, he was now being praised at the highest levels of the federal government, including the Vice President of the United States" (100).

So why do they do it? Masochism? Not so, says Soeken. And he should know, with his M.A. in social work and his Ph.D. in Human Development—and, most of all, his twenty-seven years in the U.S. Public Health Service, a field officer at the Mental Health Study Center of the National Institutes of Mental Health in Washington, where, he tells us, “I’ve done my best to help literally thousands of whistleblowers in their efforts to speak out against fraud, waste, and abuse in both government and business” (vi). Now retired from a career he didn’t really choose, he ranks as America’s best-known counselor to whistleblowers and has been profiled in *The New York Times*, *Parade* magazine, and CBS’s *60 Minutes*.

“They’re not crazy,” he says, though that is the regular charge coming from the Goliaths who are exposed when they turn on the lights. They’re committed to an ethics of truth, he tells us, often imprinted into them in the family of their childhood, where “Don’t tell lies” was a primal proverb of daily life.

We get snippets of Soeken’s own childhood too in his stories. (And he is a superb storyteller.) The shape of Soeken’s own life came from a similar ethos of truth. Kansas wheat-farmer family. German and German-Russian immigrant forbears. A Lutheran communal ethos pervading the extended family. Grandfather Henry Soeken, a “formidable presence” in his life. That’s how it started. And then he left the farm.

“I got lucky and won myself a football scholarship to Valparaiso University,” he tells us, where, when off the gridiron, he wound up doing a theology degree (!), which “though I never imagined it at the time...would also help to provide the inspiration for my decision to specialize in counseling truth tellers who ‘crash and burn’ because of psychic stress that invariably accompanies the act of going public with reports of wrongdoing” (8).

Fast forward through grad school and getting a job in Washington, D.C. "By late 1977, I had been promoted to Chief Social Worker at the U.S. Public Health Service Outpatient Clinic," where one of his tasks was administering "fitness-for-duty examinations" with folks under stress. "When I questioned the unhappy workers who'd been required to take the exams, I discovered that most of them weren't mentally ill. In far too many cases, in fact, they had simply run afoul of their bosses—frequently after blowing the whistle on some illegal or unethical practice that was taking place at the job site." And that's where his career path shifted. The nine case studies are also chapters in the author's own life.

Wilma Jefferson was the first one. Her story is chapter one. From her he heard this: "Dr. Soeken...all this happened because my supervisor made me take the 'fitness-for-duty' psychiatric exam. That's why I lost my job. They rigged the results of that exam, and I am not crazy. And do you know why I was ordered to take the test in the first place? It's because I blew the whistle on all the overtime padding that was going on in my department."

The consequence of this conversation? "Because of her valorous moral leadership, I became inspired to help whistleblowers by doing my best over the years to provide them with psychological counseling, moral support, temporary housing, legal expert-witness help, and a dozen other services that would hopefully make their violent struggles a little bit easier. Because of Wilma Jefferson and many others like her, I became a specialist in helping whistleblowers to stand tall in the service of truth" (19). The book is dedicated to Wilma Jefferson.

Because Soeken was an insider to the system, he knew where the levers were and he put his hand to them, often using the rules of one bureaucracy to countermand the rules of another in order to rescue a victim. Most often the whistleblower still was the

loser. Yet sometimes the loser wound up “winning by losing.” Winning for others, by losing for himself. Sound familiar? Like Isaiah 53 or Philippians 2?

Now and then Soeken’s storytelling tiptoes into theology. Mostly—no surprise—into left-hand-kingdom territory, where God’s scales of equity justice rule, where violations of that equity justice do get exposed—and where just deserts are called for. And where the whistleblowers themselves “rely on the law,” God’s law of preservation, God’s law of recompense, to animate their courage and determination to tell the truth.

We don’t get any explicit data from Don on the right-hand-regime resources that any of his nine prophets may have had available and put to use to get a “Second Wind,” a holy gust, to undergird their law-reliant truth telling. That would amount to drawing on Isaiah and Philippians. Did any of them have that additional Holy Gust, or didn’t they? That’s something I’d like to ask Don about. For, in the fiery furnace these truth tellers all got tossed into, did I—or did I not—see another figure sometimes standing beside them? One with the “appearance of a son of God,” as showed up amidst the flames in the prophet Daniel’s original case study? Then again, it might just have been the reflection of that Son, one of his brothers, there in the furnace with them, to wit, the author of this book.

Deep background for Crossings folks:

What I have kept secret so far is Don Soeken’s connection with Crossings. Fifty years ago and just last year. Fifty years ago in doing that theology major at Valparaiso University, where Bob Bertram and yours truly were his teachers. “Ur-crossings” (paleo-crossings?) was the new theology curriculum that Bertram had finessed through university politics as course requirements for all entering students. Bob Schultz and I were among the

planners and schemers. The prime pedagogical goal was linking faith to daily life with Biblical texts from the Sunday lectionary as groundings, and, for students thoughtful enough, linking such text-grounded faith to the daily work they'd be doing after they got their diplomas.

This book is the report card for how that all came out for Don Soeken.

Fast-forward half a century. Last year Don got the idea and then put together all the pieces to create the Crossings Legacy Fund, something none of us old hands had ever thought of. But Don took us by the hand and showed us how it could be done. And then he did it. Said fund has already grown to six figures and is now underwriting executive director Steve Kuhl's Joshua-and-Caleb-like sorties into previously unexplored territories across the Jordan.

Don Soeken has the same magnificent obsession for truth telling that his heroes have. Makes me wonder. Was it not only Grandpa Soeken and family life on the farm in Kansas, but also that college theology major?

Which prompts the following sortie into theology and into the theology major at Valparaiso University back in Don Soeken's day.

THE ORDER OF TRUTH

Back in Don's day, the regular textbook for Christian Ethics at Valparaiso University was the English translation of Werner Elert's *The Christian Ethos*. Don Soeken took the ethics course when it was my turn to teach it. Mad young Turks that we junior faculty were, we inflicted this German professor's seminary-level textbook on liberal arts undergrads! And Don was there.

At the end of chapter three, "The Configurations [*Ordnungen*, the original German term] of Daily Life in Ethos under the Law," there come concluding paragraphs on the *Ordnung* of Truth. '*Ordnung*' is Elert's term for the what and where, the "specs" that God "ordains"—hence, *Ordnung*—for each of us images of God to live out our unique existence. The *Ordnungen* are the basic givens of a person's own biography. Namely, this particular family of this particular father and mother, these specific siblings, this place on the planet, this ethnic heritage, this specific society, this time in history, this economic system, this government, this daily work, these multiple callings to be God's person, God's image (= reflector) at this spot in time and history.

All of these ordainings, configurations, are people-linked realities. Me and my relationships.

Underlying them all, says Elert, is the *Ordnung* of Truth. Only when truth is passing back and forth in these relationships is the relationship "in order," wholesome, nourishing, life-enhancing. Destroy truth telling in any of the *Ordnungen*—marriage, family, government, the workplace—and chaos takes over.

Worse still, the ancient enemy of the creator, the devil [*diabolos* = destroyer] takes over. Remember, Jesus designates him the "father of lies." Deception, destruction, death is the sequence in this unholy triad. Which is, of course, the ancient Biblical story of the lie replacing truth, with the Father of Lies entering human history.

That story unfolds something like this. The *Ordnung* of the relationship between creator and human creature is that the former sets the specs for the existence of the latter. Potter and pot is Jeremiah's image for this. Present in Eden are two

trees. Tree of Life, tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. The Creator has the knowledge of Good and Evil, knowledge that is beyond the capacity of the human creature. Ditto for the Tree of Life with its multi-dimensions far beyond the limits of 3-D humans. "Hands off both of these. Don't try to take over the jurisdiction of either one. It's a turf beyond your abilities. You have no antennae for operating in a 4-D, 5-D, 6-D universe. To try to do so is suicide. You shall surely die. That's the TRUTH in the Creator/creature relationship."

Aha, but now comes the deceiver: "Think about it. God says good/evil management is deity-alone turf. But you humans are already close enough, just as unique creatures, to the turf of deity. Just look once at the good/evil knowledge tree. Patently good, right? You can see that on your own. God's no-no can't be the truth, can it? He says it's deity-alone turf. Might that not mean this? If/when you take over good/evil management yourself, you become deity. Now is that something good or not?"

But it's a lie. It triggers the 3-D triad of deception, destruction, death, the tragic constants of human history as far back as we can trace it.

Each of Soeken's cases replicates the ancient Eden story. The foundations themselves are damaged—at worst, destroyed—when truth is replaced by the lie as humans interact in the multiple linkages they have with each other and with the creation itself. Also, of course, the ground-of-being relationship with the Creator. And no wonder: the Destroyer is the Father of Lies. To destroy any of the Creator's ordainings—and, eventually, the creatures in those configurations—is the Ur-agenda of the "mystery of wickedness." All he needs to do is to nudge them (us) to stop "truthing" it with one another.

That may be the "deep background," Don—why the multitude of

truth tellers you have aided all these years so seldom come out as obvious winners. They are wrestling with a foe even greater than Northrup Corporation, the USMC, the U.S. government. It is God's own "old evil foe" who is in the mix, "who means deadly woe. Deep guile (= deceit) and great might are his dread arms in fight. On earth is not his equal" (Luther, verse one, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God").

Yet these nine people, with you as ally, are still alive, though battered and beaten, when you bring these chapters to closure. Who, who all, was their ally?

So tell us more, Don. You're a theologian. You surely sang (doubtless memorized!) Luther's "A Mighty Fortress" hymn already back on the farm in Kansas. Was Luther's next verse in the mix too for some of these truth tellers? Possibly transmitted by you? I wonder.

With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One,
Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this?
Jesus Christ it is,
Of Sabaoth Lord,
And there's none other God;
He holds the field forever.

Edward H. Schroeder
St. Louis MO
May 22, 2014

The Daily Life of the Christian, Part 2

This week we bring you a part two of Steve Kuhl's essay on the daily life of the Christian, which he wrote as an introduction to his lay education course of the same name. (Part one can be found [here](#).)

Also, a reminder that Steve's offer stands: If you would like to gather a group of Christians for the purpose of "Crossing Life with the Promise of Christ," please feel free to contact him at Steve at skuhl1ATwiD0TrrD0Tcom. He'll be happy to work with you in designing an event to suit your needs.

Peace and Joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

On the Daily Life of the Christian, Part II: Implications of the Doctrine of Vocation for Daily Life

The fruit of this course will be in the unpacking of what this freedom [that is, the Christian's freedom *from* the deadly threats of the law and *for* the love and service of neighbor] means in the daily life of the Christian generally, and in the lives of students particularly. In anticipation of that goal let me conclude by making a few observations about what the concept of vocation does and does not provide to the Christian. Here I am indebted to several sources, including the section on "Vocation" in Werner Elert's book, *The Christian Ethos*, pp. 131-135; Kathryn Kleinhans's excellent article, "The Work of the Christian: Vocation in Lutheran Perspective," in *Word & World*,

Vol. 25, No. 4, 2005: 402; and Gary Simpson's review essay, "Daunting Indeed! A Critical Conversation with The Promise of Lutheran Ethics," in *Word & World*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1999, pp. 187-200.

First, the doctrine of vocation corrects the very common misunderstanding that God "has a plan for my life" which I have to somehow figure out and get right. The doctrine of vocation neither prescribes nor bars certain occupational/vocational choices. Vocation is about recognizing that in whatever situation of life I find myself, I am there to serve my neighbor on God's behalf. It does not necessarily answer why I live in those circumstances, but it does tell me for whom I'm there: I'm there to serve others on God's behalf. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a case in point. The key feature of vocation, then, is its twofold freedom *from* the accusation of the law and *for* the service of neighbor. In his "On the Freedom of a Christian," Luther describes this dialectical character of the Christian life as living "spontaneously."

Second, the doctrine of vocation does not provide a blueprint on how to organize marriage, family, or economic, political, and societal life, but it does presuppose sociality or "relationality" (sic!) as an inescapable fact of life. "It is not good that *Adam* (the human) should be alone," says God (Gen. 2:18). That statement is not a psychological assessment about the dangers of loneliness, but a theological assertion about how God includes humanity in his ongoing creative and providential activity in the world as a whole. Humans are, by divine intention, "created co-creators," to use Phil Hefner's term. God calls us (V2) through our relationships with others (beginning with marriage and family and expanding from there into economic, civic, national and international networks) so that through those relationships all may know and experience God's creative and providential care—an effect given concise and poetic

rendering in the hymn "Praise and Thanksgiving" (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* # 689).

Third, while the doctrine of vocation does not provide a blueprint for how to organize a society, it does provide a standpoint from which to critique aspects of any particular societal arrangement. Just as the doctrine emerged as a critique of the ecclesiastical classism that dominated late Medieval Society, so it also rightly provides, in my judgment, a critique of the kind of classism that pervades modern capitalist culture—particularly, the way it privileges capital over labor and the subsequent denigration of work and exploitation of the working class. The doctrine of vocation, at least as Luther develops it, has the "common good" as its focus. A good or just society is one that shows no partiality with regard to one's particular location or status in society and, therefore, values all necessary work by compensating it with a just or living wage. The presence of the "working poor" contradicts the doctrine of vocation. Luther's advocacy of public education for all, his writings on the practice of usury, his strong support for a community chest, and his teaching on the role of secular authorities to maintain order and justice for the sake of the common good are all rooted in his doctrine of vocation.

Fourth, the central feature of Luther's notion of vocation and the nature of the Christian life is that it is characterized as "life in the Spirit" as opposed to "life under law." Law and promise are aligned as stark alternatives. Of course, Luther is not the inventor of this idea. His source is Paul and such Pauline assertions as, "Christ is the end of the law so there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4), and "if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law" (Gal. 5:18). In Luther's day this contrast between law and promise was blunted by both Roman Catholic and Reformed interpreters of the Christian life. The Roman Catholic tradition

(with its nature/grace theology) saw life in the Spirit or grace as providing sufficient strength to a Christian's human nature so as to assist him or her in fulfilling the demands of the law and in being justified on that basis. The Reformed tradition (with its sin/grace theology) saw life in the Spirit or grace as forgiveness of past sin, but in a way that confirms the law as the eternal will of God (under the category of the Third Use of the Law) which is still binding on Christians. Each tradition saw Luther's approach as antinomian and a pretense for licentiousness, whereas Luther saw their approaches as legalistic and a negation of Christian freedom.

Luther insists that his understanding of Paul (with his law-promise theology) is not antinomian. Although Paul was also accused of being anti-law by the Judaizers of his day, Luther thinks Paul successfully refutes that charge. This he does by seeing the personhood of the Christian, in dialectical fashion, as a battle ground between the old self subject to the law and the new self led by the Spirit. Christians are simultaneously saints and sinners: righteous by the measure of faith and Christ; unrighteous by the measure of works and the law. The call out of darkness into light is still unfolding; the old self is still in the process of passing away and the new self is still in the process of emerging. When physical death finally comes, the battle will cease: the person identified by faith and Christ will endure, and the person identified by works and law will cease. But, in the meantime, as that battle rages on, the law continues to have its twofold purpose of restraining and condemning the old sinful self of the Christian.

Even so, what ultimately characterizes the Christian life is the new self that is emerging in Christ. This new self is led by the promptings of the Spirit, which is freedom, and not by the accusations of the law, which is bondage. But that does not mean that the Christian life is anti-law. The new self that

characterizes the Christian is both “lord over all” and “servant to all,” including the law. This servant-lordship means that Christians are free to use or not to use the law insofar as it is fitting or helpful relative to their setting in life, that is, relative to the needs of their neighbors (Cf. 1 Cor. 6:12). Personally, this servant-lordship is the heart of Christian self-discipline. Christians can freely use the law in coordination with the promise to facilitate the life of repentance, the process of dying to sin and rising in Christ. Socially or vocationally (V2), a broad spectrum of responses to the law is open to the Christian as Lord over all and servant to all. Conceivably, there may be times when the Christian as “lord over all” might exercise his or her “service to all” by rebuking the law. This may happen, for example, for the sake of the gospel, specifically, or in service of bringing about some measure of needed civic peace or restorative justice through compromise. On the other hand, there may be times when the Christian as “servant to all” will vigorously use his or her “lordship over all” to defend, support, and employ the law. This may happen, for example, in response to social injustices that become exposed over time or partisan privileges that need rectifying. The point is, as Gary Simpson has summarized, “Christian freedom sustains and assists God’s law to discharge its civil function of protecting neighbors from the ravages of sin and evil, while preserving and promoting their temporal flourishing, and also to accomplish its theological function of revealing sin before the judgment seat of God” (p. 193).

Finally, vocation as both the call to salvation (V1) and the call to be Christ-like servants to our neighbor (V2) has its origin and continuing existence in faith in the Word of God. Therefore, an essential feature of the daily life of the Christian is being nurtured in that faith through exposure to the Word of Promise. In the *Smalcald Articles*, Luther identifies

five ways in which the gospel comes to us: through the spoken/received Word, through baptism, through Holy Communion, through the power of the keys, and through the mutual conversation and consolation of fellow Christians. It must be remembered that none of these five ways is simply a one-time act that is done and left behind. They are all activities of God, experienced (mediated) through the community of believers (the Church), that Christians make use of regularly, repeatedly, daily. It is no oversimplification to say that Prayer and Word are the sum total of the Christian life. The Christian life is a lively conversation with God. For as we experience suffering and joy, success and failure, guilt and vindication, pride and humiliation, emptiness and fulfillment in our exercise of our vocations in the world (V2), how can we not but turn to God in prayer? And, as listening prayers, when we hear anew the promise of his call to be Children of God, through such means as Word and Sacrament, keys and Christian conversation (V1), how can we not but be revitalized and equipped anew for our vocational placement in the world (V2)?

Objectives for the course: This course will help students understand better their calling to follow Christ in everyday life. By course end students will be able to do the following:

- Articulate what it means to be called to salvation in Christ (V1). Understand the law-gospel dialectic.
- Identify the various worldly callings (V2) that define their respective lives, whether chosen or thrust upon them. What “secular resources” do they use or need to develop for this service (through the exercise of self-discipline)? What do these callings do *to them*? What do they do *for them*?
- Describe how V1 and V2 are related in general and in their own particular life-circumstances, specifically. Give examples of how the gospel of Christ has informed the way

they live in the world.

- List the “spiritual” resources (V1) they use in sustaining their “secular” assignments (V2). Give examples of how they are sustained/supported/enlivened by the Word.

The Daily Life of the Christian, Part 1

This week we bring you a part one of a two-part essay by the Rev. Dr. Steven Kuhl, a frequent Crossings contributor who served as the President of Crossings for many years and who has just started a new position as Executive Director of Crossings.

Steve wrote this essay as an introduction to a course called The Daily Life of the Christian, which he teaches as part of the two-year [Diakonia program](#) of lay education in theology. As you’ll see, he draws his students into the major themes of his course by focusing on vocation, particularly as Luther understood that term.

By the way, Steve is available to come to a location near you if you’d like to gather a group of Christians for the purpose of “Crossing Life with the Promise of Christ.” He can be reached at skuhl1ATwiDOTrrDOTcom.

Peace and joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

On the Daily Life of the Christian, Part I

Purpose of the course: This course will explore the meaning and practice of the daily life of the Christian with the goal of helping students better understand the salvation to which they have been called and the implications of that “calling” for living out their particular “callings” in their daily lives. We will explore this overarching theme through the lens of what Luther called “vocation.”

The word ‘vocation’ comes from the Latin word *vocatio* (summons, bidding), which in turn comes from *vocare*, meaning “to call.” In Luther’s day, ‘vocation’ (he also used the German word *Beruf*, “calling,” to define it) referred to the calling of people into “spiritual” or “sacred” occupations (such as monks and priests) which were regarded as a superior (more perfect) form of life in comparison to “secular” or “profane” occupations (such as farmers and housewives). Luther rejected this classist view of vocation and said that all Christians share equally in the “spiritual estate” by virtue of their baptism into Christ, because baptism makes them all—equally!—Children of God. Moreover, because God shows no partiality with regard to worldly status or position—indeed, he assigns us these positions as part of his network of creative and providential care and governance of the world—Christians can therefore live out their singular baptismal identity faithfully no matter what their particular worldly or secular occupations or circumstances may be. As Luther states in his “Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” “Every occupation has its own honor before God, as well as its own requirements and duties” (LW 46:246). And, as the *Augsburg Confession* states succinctly, “All people, whatever their calling, should seek perfection, that is, growth in the fear of God, in faith, in the love for their neighbor, and in similar spiritual virtues” (*Apology* XXVII, 37).

'Vocation', therefore, as Luther understood it, has a twofold meaning. On the one hand, it refers to how we as Christians are related to God through the gospel as children of God. Call this referent V1: the fact that we as Christians have been called out of darkness into light, from condemnation to salvation, from death to life. On the other hand, 'vocation' also refers to how God has inserted us into the world or assigned us our location in that dynamic, ever-changing network of relationships, activities, and events called creation. Call this referent V2: the fact that God has placed us in our particular worldly locations to be good stewards of his creation. Through vocation (V2), God both provides for our every bodily need and assigns us a contributing place in that provisioning.

As compatible as V1 and V2 are in the life of a Christian, it is important also to note their difference. We are *born* into V2 "by nature" (with the complicating fact of sin as a congenital oppositional defiance of God), and that vocation is inherently temporal. Not only does it change in time but there will be a time when it will be no more. By contrast, we are *reborn* into V1 (a reconciled relation to God) "by grace through faith in Jesus Christ," and that vocation is eternal or spiritual in nature. Therefore, the question that we will be probing as we explore the daily life of the Christian is this: How does that rebirth impact our natural placement within the world? How does faith in Christ (V1) inform our understanding and lived experience in those various "posts of responsibility" (V2) that we find ourselves in on this side of the resurrection, whether they were chosen by us or thrust upon us? What we will discover, as Kathryn Kleinhans has said, is that "Christian vocation is theology for living" or, better, "lived theology" ("The Work of a Christian: Vocation in Lutheran Perspective," *Word & World*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2005: 402).

Therefore, when we inquire into the daily life of a Christian,

we ask, What is distinctive about the calling (V1) of Christians in their various vocations (V2) or placements or occupations? Here the Christian art of distinguishing God's law and God's promise (gospel) is central.

The Christian, like the non-Christian, lives his or her life in a world that is characterized as "life under law." Because the good relationships (V2) that God establishes for us humans to live in through his ongoing act of creation are threatened and corrupted by our very own human rebellion against God (sin as a self-centered rather than God-centered disposition), God has laid down the law. The law of God is an expression of God's displeasure, anger or wrath upon sinful humanity. Its primary character is to call sinners to account for their stewardship, and it operates according to the principle of reciprocity ("as you sow, so shall you reap"). In general, the law of God is experienced by us as a sense of obligation over all that we are and do, and it is coextensive with human reasoning, critical thought, and the maintenance of just human relations.

As Luther emphasized, the law of God achieves a twofold purpose within the present sin-infested world. In "the meantime," it restrains sinners so as to bring about some measure of security, creativity, and stability within the fallen world. This Luther called the political or civil function of the law. It makes possible some semblance of civilization or discipline among sinners. (Cf. Gal. 3:24.) Ultimately, however, the law condemns sinners to death, putting a personal and historical end to their rebellion. Luther called this the theological or spiritual function of the law, and it coincides with Paul's dictum, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Genesis 3 is the classic text for describing, in parabolic or mythical fashion, this first great mystery of Christian theology: how the congenial creation of God could turn against its Creator and become life under law. What Scripture calls the law of God, then, was not part of God's

original intention. "The law was added because of sin" (Gal. 3:19), says Paul, and has become integral to God's providential rule over a fallen world. Therefore, ever since sin entered the world, God's law has been a permanent feature of it and coextensive with every worldly calling a person has. In their vocations, people experience the world as an ambiguous place. For there, in their vocations (V2), they experience, on the one hand, the reality of sin, the restraining pressures of the law, and the ultimate fact of death, and, on the other hand, the reality of God's providence which ensures a measure of stability, creativity, and security so that bodily needs are met. Through vocation (V2), God provides all those things that are comprehended, as Luther says, under the category of "daily bread." (Cf. Luther's *Large Catechism*.)

But God's word of law is not the whole story about God's interaction with his rebellious creation. Also indicated in the Genesis text (nascent in the call of Abraham) is God's promise to redeem sinful humanity from this law-inflicted predicament, the second great mystery of Christian theology. The material fulfillment of this promise happened when God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to redeem sinners from what Paul calls the "curse" of the law. This he did personally, in his own body, by exhausting the curse through his death on the cross and establishing life in the spirit through his resurrection from the dead. (Cf. Gal. 3:10-14.) The antidote to God's act of laying down the law *on* sinners, then, is God's act of lifting up Christ *for* sinners. In Christ God has established a new creation (described by Paul as "life in the spirit," as opposed to "life under the law") that is characterized by a twofold freedom: freedom *from* the imprisoning power of sin, the incriminating curse of the law, and the annihilating punishment of death; and freedom *for* a life marked by the liberating power of Christ's righteousness, the undeserved blessedness of his mercy, and the

unsurpassable glory of his divine and eternal life.

It is important to note that the promise of Christ comes to fallen humanity as a second calling (V1) from God, in Jesus' call to "follow me." That calling always stands in tension with—indeed, in opposition to—the preceding, accusatory calling of the law: "Adam, where are you? What have you done?" Specifically, the call to follow Christ is an invitation to live in the world freely by faith in the promise, and not to live slavishly in fear, denial of, or reaction to the law. That second calling directs us into the new reality that Paul labels "the new creation in Christ," and we enter into it by faith. To trust in Christ is to be in Christ. To be in Christ is to be under his kingdom, covered by his grace, as by an umbrella, even though we are still living in a world deluged in the rain (reign) of the law of God.

It is also important to note that the call of Christ (V1) is not a call for Christians to abandon the world under law or our particular vocational placements with it (V2). That was the Anabaptist mistaken counterpoint to the classist view of vocation in the Medieval Church. On the contrary, the second call reinserts us into our various worldly occupations in a new way that both fulfills the purposes of V2 and invites those whom we encounter there to have more than what V2 provides: to have V1, the call into salvation. No one lives by bread alone (V2); indeed, if people live they live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (V1), the call to salvation in Christ. As the Offertory Prayer in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* stated it, we as Christians are in the world for both "the care (V2) and the redemption (V1) of all that God has made."

As a result, the operative word for describing the daily life of the Christian for Luther is 'freedom', as indicated by the title of his seminal work, *On the Freedom of a Christian*. The

Christian by virtue of faith stands under the grace of Christ and thus shares in the freedom Christ has won in his death and resurrection. As a freedom *from* the deadly threats of the law and a freedom *for* the love and service of neighbor, the freedom of the Christian is surprisingly paradoxical and counterintuitive to sinners not yet awakened to the bondage that life under law presents. Luther's thesis describes the daily life of a Christian as follows: "A Christian is lord of all, completely free from everything (V1); a Christian is a servant, completely attentive to the needs of all (V2)." The Christian life as a calling from God is therefore lived in two dimensions simultaneously: in faith toward God and in love toward the neighbor. Through the Word, our faith in God's promise is established and sustained; through this faith, we discipline ourselves so that the neighbor is provided for and sustained.

Book Review: SABBATH AS RESISTANCE by Walter Brueggemann

This week we bring you a short review of Walter Brueggemann's *Sabbath as Resistance*. Our reviewer is Richard Gahl, who last reviewed a book for us in [Thursday Theology #676](#). Dick uses this review as an occasion to reflect briefly on the role of a God who promises rest in a world that's restless with getting and spending.

Peace and joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

SABBATH AS RESISTANCE: *Saying No to the Culture of Now.*

By Walter Brueggemann.

Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

124 pages. Paper. \$14.00

Reviewed by Richard Gahl.

The word ‘resistance’ in connection with ‘Sabbath’ is an attention grabber. But Brueggemann does more than grab our attention. He helps the reader to see a God of promise who gives rest to His people. *Sabbath as Resistance* provides well-documented diagnosis and prognosis regarding the commandment that serves as the bridge between the two tables of the law—especially the First and the Tenth Commandments. A vivid contrast of restless consumerism and restful neighborliness sets the stage for a new way of living that resists the way of the world.

Pharaoh’s relentless production schedule for brickmaking as described in Exodus 5 is the context where “all levels of social power—gods, Pharaoh, supervisors, taskmasters, slaves—are uniformly caught up in and committed to the grind of endless production (p. 5).” Sitting at the top of the social pyramid, Pharaoh demanded everything should flow upward for his benefit. He was the only one who should benefit from the social system. Everyone else existed for him.

Matthew 6 gives evidence of a similar phenomenon with mammon (capital or wealth). It is a master of endless desire, endless productivity, and endless restlessness (p. 11). Commodity drives the system for the benefit of those with means. Brueggemann notes that we see this today in the political efforts “to own and control congress and court appointments in order that laws

may be enacted concerning credits and tax arrangements and regulatory agencies to make way for production by the strong and well-connected in their desire for more (p. 15).” Maintaining one’s place at the top of the heap in the money game is paramount.

Brueggemann contends that in the Ten Commandments the world meets a different kind of God—a god unlike all of the gods the slaves from Egypt had known before. This One is a “God of mercy, steadfast love, and faithfulness who is committed to covenantal relationships of fidelity. At the taproot of this divine commitment to relationship (covenant) rather than commodity is the capacity and willingness of this God to rest (p. 6).” So the Sabbath command becomes God’s gift of rest for those who have been caught up in the restlessness of relentless production. It establishes a new way to live.

In the face of mammon, Jesus invites all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens to come to him for rest. This is a new Sabbath for the commodity society imposed on the many for the benefit of the few.

The neighbor is now seen in a new light. Brueggemann points out how both Exodus and Deuteronomy hold up neighbor in a new way in the bridge commandment. There were no neighbors in Egypt’s system, only threats and competitors. Now God brings about a neighborly community (p. 26). As Brueggemann explains, “the odd insistence of the God of Sinai is to counter anxious productivity with committed neighborliness. The latter practice does not produce so much; but it creates an environment of security and respect and dignity that redefines the human project (p. 28).” Deuteronomy groups family, slaves, livestock and resident aliens in the Sabbath observance. Brueggemann contends, “this one day breaks the pattern of coercion; all are *like you*—equal worth, equal value, equal access, equal rest

(p. 41).” All neighbors are included in these commands: “Coveting is the ultimate destruction of the neighborhood, for coveting generates mistrust and sets neighbor against neighbor (p. 69).”

This brief book concludes by connecting a stirring anecdote (which you will have to read for yourself) with a wonderful word of promise from Psalm 73:

*Nevertheless, I am continually with you
You hold my right hand.*

Brueggemann finds here no casual hand-holding but a life-or-death grip where God will not let go (p. 89). What a glorious promise in the midst of a world of anxiety-prone restlessness growing out of the relentless productivity that estranges humankind from one another. But, resting in the arms of God’s faithfulness, the faithful move into the world to benefit the neighbor in need.

An ongoing task for a Christian leader is to lead in the formation of a culture of generosity. Any stewardship emphasis will be enriched by *Sabbath as Resistance*, where the 24/7 treadmill of relentless production, continuous acquisition of things, and the ever widening gap of income inequality is brought into the healing light of Sabbath rest. We pray for the gift of loving the Lord with heart, soul, strength, and mind, and the neighbor as ourselves.