

Ed Schroeder's Thursday Theologies: The Gospel, God's Plus for Us

As you search the digital tracks of 500 weeks of Thursday Theologies, you will see that not one is less than 3 printed pages. That means that Ed Schroeder has treated us to 1,500-plus pages of literature over the past 10 years. Emphasis on the plus.

Also, you will see that there is no index of the Thursday Theologies either-which is a shame. Yet, seven being a holy number, we think we have outlined all of Ed's writings into seven main groups (plus or minus a few-but probably emphasis again on the plus).

1. Things Lutheran, including theology (confessional teachings), church institutions (ELCA, LCMS, Seminex), presses (The Lutheran)
2. Ecumenism and ecumenical agreements (Catholics, Episcopalians, Reformed, etc.).
3. International missiology (Ed and Marie being two of the finest missiologists)
4. Politics (and repentance)
5. Book reviews
6. Sexuality studies (both homosexual and heterosexual)
7. Preaching the Gospel (sermons, and reflections on the theme of the church year)

You're welcome to add to the list. We are not offering an index here, however.

In all of the Thursday Theologies, Ed rarely stopped to reflect

on where all these Thursday sharings were going. He just wrote, and wrote some more, or passed the baton to others. For example, he shared the writings of Thursday Theology with junior and senior colleagues alike, and was always genuinely interested in what other people had to say about it all-even inviting and sharing his reader's responses. Nor did Ed write in one place. Many of his offerings came from his home on Russell Blvd. in St. Louis, but it was not unusual to hear from Ed from such diverse places as Singapore, Ethiopia, the Holy Land, Denmark, or New Haven, Connecticut (Yale Divinity School). Significantly, no matter what the topic of the day might be, none of them were able to so "stump him" that he couldn't see how a sprout (the stem of Jesse) might emerge from it. That is to say, he often used those topics as "hooks" to get his readers interested, and interest he did pique, but not interest simply in the topic of the day, but how that topic was always entrée to the topic of the gospel.

Once, however, Ed gave a summary. In Thursday Theology #185. "Topic: Year End's Summary: the Hassle about the Gospel." That came as his last offering in 2001. You may recall the year mostly for "9/11". Ed, however, sees the more perennial theme even here-and maybe just provided his own summary for all his Thursday Theologies.

"Seems to me [you can hear Ed's high-pitched voice already] that the Hassle about the Gospel has been the dominant thread in this year's postings. Frequent themes-homosexuality, historic episcopate, church building programs, mission theology, preaching, and those two months worth of repentance postings-were finally variations on 'Just what is the Gospel, and what is it not.' It's all been about the farm-wagon wheel that I learned to use for imaging 'good' theology, when I was a classroom theology prof.... All the spokes of the Christian wheel must fit into the hub, aka the Gospel, must be socketed, grounded in that

hub, or they don't belong in the Christian wheel. They are spokes from some other wheel-of which there are many. Many other wheels are rolling around and through Christian churches nowadays, Lutheran churches included."

Of course! In fact, Ed's "wagon-wheel" of confessing Christian theology (which Lutheranism is at its best, which is rare) is grounded in the Gospel at the center, from which emanates all the other spokes. Ed's "wagon-wheel" diagram is a staple of appreciating the Augsburg Confession aright.

But in case you missed it (it being "the Gospel") in #185, you can see it again in ThTh #253: "Topic: The Eastering of Robert W. Bertram." That came out on Maundy Thursday of 2003, the year Bob made his final crossing, to which Ed offers his own "requiem" (or "encomium"-warm, glowing praise). He begins with these words: "At Luther's funeral, Philip Melanchthon was the preacher. His most poignant words were: 'Most of all I thank God for Martin Luther because he taught me the Gospel.'" Ed's reflections brought him to comment on the displayed 8-foot banner at Bob's memorial liturgy which was used at "many a Seminec procession," which "boldly proclaims: 'We shall rise OUR LORD to meet, treading DEATH beneath our feet.'" Ed concludes: "In the Bertram version, 'Life is not win/lose. Nor is it win/win, says Jesus. It's lose/lose. But there are two different ways to lose! One is hanging onto your life like this [arms clutched around self] and that is Lose-PERIOD! The other is giving your life away [hands extended palms open] connected to Christ. You still lose your life, but this losing is Lose-COMMA. And there is another clause coming.' Today we mark God's COMMA to the life of blessed Bob. The rest of the sentence of Bob's life story is on the banner. The Gospel is in that comma. Bob taught me the Gospel."

So what were all those thousands of pages over 10 years about?

What's the real "plus" of Ed's Thursday Theologies?

That's simple.

The Gospel.

And that emphasis on the Gospel is what the other 14 contributors to milestone ThTh #500 below also "got," and specifically from Ed.

Just don't "plus" the Gospel with something "other" or "alien." Ed helped to fend that off, week-after-week, Thursday-after-Thursday. That's what has made Thursday Theology so rewarding and renewing to us all. It brought us back to the hub of the wagon-wheel, what Bob and Ed, and Martin and Philip, and all saints before and after and now have in common: confessing the Gospel of Jesus the Christ.

Thanks, Ed, for so confessing.

Michael Hoy

President, Crossings Community, 1995-1999

Steven C. Kuhl

President, Crossings Community, 1999-Present

The Epiphany of our Lord 2008

Contributions for ThTh 500

1. DAVID BOEDECKER

I am a relative late-comer to Crossings but have to come to appreciate its thought-provoking proddings and pokings. I am an LCMEss product, prepped at Concordia Milwaukee and was one of the last classes ('75) to have been privileged to have been a part of the Ft. Wayne (Indiana) Senior

College community. You know, after all the fighting of the 70s, the bitter fruits of which we are still swallowing, your crossing my life and my pastoral ministry has been a true blessing. Thanks to you I can stop saying "I shoulda gone to Seminex" and live instead in the present and enjoy your gift of Crossings. I remember the "they are taking away our Bible" ranting of President Preus et al but ironically if you all "took away our Bible," you have always honored and proclaimed our Christ. MANY THANKS FOR THE BLESSINGS THAT YOU HAVE SENT MY WAY. Rev. David Boedecker,
Marshall, Michigan.

2. DEAN LUEKING

Ed Schroeder's gentle kick in the rear to us who read TTh regularly but contribute irregularly moves me to speak up. For the past two years I have been on the road much of the time, looking up Lutherans on various continents and asking this lead question: "What does it mean to be a Lutheran Christian in this place?" In places where Christians are under heavy pressure, Bethlehem in the Holy Land is a prime example, the answer comes through loud and clear – "grace" and generous witness to Jesus crucified and risen for us as the content of grace. In Africa as well, Tanzania comes to mind, the clarity of Christ as sufficient for salvation is what I heard often from Lutherans who live where other prosperity gospels abound (of which we have more than our share here). And, come to think of it, in an interview with the former prime minister of Norway, Kjell Bondevik, I heard one of the clearest statements ever of justification by faith as the heart of his vocation as a statesman. In too many other places that I know anything about, the witness of Lutherans is more murky than clear, too often lost in fussing with other Lutherans.

In not a few of these places around the world Ed and Marie have gone to teach and preach, and wherever I have traced their steps they are well remembered. Can we clone Ed Schroeder export? It's been pure grace to know him as friend and classmate since earlier in the last century, and what is best about this durable friendship is the true-north-on-the-compass effect that his Gospel centering always exerts. Now, lest you take my words as Ed-pleasing, Edward, let me push you to push for more ThTh testimony to what Gospel centeredness looks like in the lived ministries of God's people – laity as we call them – in the daily life of the world.

Peace and Joy!

Dean Lueking

3. CLIFF BISCHOFF

Greetings, This is from Cliff Bischoff, Concordia Seminary, St Louis, class of 1971.

What can I say? Congratulations. Best wishes. Gottes Segen.

I discovered the web site a few months ago. You have brought back to me pleasant and unpleasant memories. I was at Carl Meyer's funeral and Dr Piepkorn's funeral and a few others. My pastoral pilgrimage at Bethesda (Pine Lawn, a St. Louis suburb) was from 1971 until 1980. I was privileged to see first hand the voluminous papers of Dr Piepkorn, being acquainted at that time with the archivist who was working on the project. WOW! What a life he had!

But irony of ironies I hope to retire in St Louis in the not so distant future. How about lunch? We certainly have much to talk about! But is that what the old guys do? Talk

about the past? But to fail to understand the past is to fail the future. The story of the past needs to be told. I am not much of a writer but have much to say including being an uninvited observer at a Voter Meeting where the Office of Head Pastor was abolished in order to get rid of the Pastor. What a night that was!

I am not sure what you were looking for but here it is. Thank you for what you are contributing and doing. Perhaps in a few months I can add to the dialogue.

4. DON SCHEDLER

I have been so emboldened by the teaching of ThTh over the years that I finally wrote something for it – a book review of Culture Warrior, by Bill O'Reilly. In the editing process ye old editor taught me some more things. I see that Culture Warrior has become a best seller again in the paperback edition. Concern for the culture there seems to be – whether O'Reilly has good answers is still a question. Is it too tangential to remind that Nietzsche said, "If we know the WHY we can stand any HOW {read 'culture'}" [emphasis added], but a theologian (I wish I had the attribution), summarizing the book of Job, said, "If we know the WHO, we can stand any HOW {read 'culture'} even if we do not know the WHY." [emphasis added.]

5. MARCUS FELDE

I have an inkling that James (of the letter of James) was the original Sabbatheologian. Is it possible (at least) that the practice of programming the pericopes could salvage even the epistle of straw? Perhaps, if Luther had had the advantage of our "Chi-Ray" vision, he might not have been so dismissive? Note that James provides neat diagnosis and prognosis terms for us, in chapter one.

Diagnosis: "[W]hen desire (Step 2) has conceived, it gives

birth to sin (Step 1), and . . . sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death (Step 3).” (James 1:15)

Prognosis: “[H]e gave us birth by the word of truth.” (1:18, Step 4) So that we might be “hearers of the Word” (1:23, Step 5) and also “doers of the Word” (1:22, Step 6).

In other words, although James does indeed speak most of the time out of the sixth box, he is not oblivious to boxes 1-5. Death-Birth are apposite at the “eternal” level, “(other) desires” and being hearers of the Word are the “internal” poles, and the external opposites are sin and “doing the Word.” Perhaps the rest of the letter should be read in the light of this grid?

6. JEFF ANDERSON

Ed, I am not sure what will “fit the bill” for your “celebration text” so I offer a few, and you can pick one or none. First a play on the Veni-Vidi-Vici theme with a Crossings twist:

I came, I saw, I conquered
I conquered, I ruled, I died.

He came, he saw, he died,
He lives, he calls me, I rise.

Second, a little model that came to me on Christmas Eve when I sat in the “Festival Service” feeling a bit melancholy:

The meaninglessness of life fades when I commit myself in the moment to a phrase of the creed, like “on the third day He rose again” or “He suffered”, because then each century of hard-wrought doctrine becomes mine.

Finally, a limerick, of all things, that fits the season (note: "blue" does not refer to the sky, but is the down to earth color the church has often used to symbolize the Blessed Virgin Mary):

Humankind was in a dense dither
All running yon, thither and hither.
When out of the "blue"
Came a Word that said, You
Are my child through the Christ now forever.

7. CARL UCHTMANN

The secular world still obsesses with vengeance and violence. The Gospel is inherently justice and mercy. Unfortunately much of theological jargon is still hung up on Aristotelian logic, the logic of ABSOLUTES!!!! Not willing to dialog about quantum logic. This Eli Wiesel classifies as contextual violence to Holy Writ. I. e., centuries before the gospel: "Vengeance is mine!!!!!! saith the LORD!!!!!! And a comment [from Jesus] which always comes to mind: "I am come not to replace the Law, but to fulfill it." Anyway one struggles to approach a God composed of absolutes which admittedly involves (as does quantum math and physics) many ambiguities.

Recognizing that in planet earth's "time" dimensions one can only see "through the glass darkly," but in cosmic dimensions (which Einstein discerned while imagining himself riding on the lightwave) are timeless!!!! Hallelujah. I.e., I AM (JHWH) Amen.

8. BRITA PARK

As a beneficiary of the most recent twenty-two ThTh postings, let my clip be a THANK-YOU, ED! My father, as

you know, died in May 2006, and since then all of his children are re-discovering so many dimensions of his rich and multifaceted 92 years. Relevant to this “thank-you, Ed” is that my father instilled in us the understanding that a literate Christian doesn’t have to bemoan the fact that we at times are fed “mediocre theology” on a Sunday morning, and self-pityingly slip into a lukewarm pattern of thought and in-action. He felt that one can/must go after the “Schwarzbrot”, [Ed: “black-bread” = “real” bread in the culture of this German refugee-family from Riga, Latvia] the challenging, nourishing, tough “chew”, which doesn’t disappear into fluff after the Sunday service, but sustains us in our Monday world. And the sources of such real bread are many. Living in rural western Canada for the last 55 years of his life, he collected (and read daily!) the writings of Bonhoeffer—his guiding “mentor”. On his bookshelf I also found Karl Barth’s sermons to prisoners, the sermon by Berlin Bishop Dibelius, “The Prodigal Son’s Return to his Father’s House,” delivered 3 August, 1947, in the Marienkirche in Berlin, and on and on. For 55 years my parents never missed a Sunday church service at St. John’s Lutheran [Oliver, British Columbia], unless physically prevented to do so, by a rare illness or even rarer snowstorm. They loved the liturgy, the hymns, the communion, and many of the sermons. On the occasional Sunday when Papa felt he was served “fluff-bread”, he would choose a sermon from his bookshelf, and read it to us over Sunday dinner. This past summer, when you and Marie visited us in Oliver, and opened up the possibility of receiving your ThTh postings, as well as the Sabbathology, I was delighted. For me, this electronic means has become a weekly source of “Schwarzbrot”. THANK-YOU, ED! from Brita

9. PAUL ROWOLD

What does prophecy look like today? We are familiar with contemporary preaching and worship, modern (and post-modern) theology, ecumenism and missiology for the 21st Century. But the work of prophets is difficult to distinguish from age to age—prophecy does not lend itself to typologies (or any other ways to tame it, for that matter). The vision that marks genuine prophecy transcends time and cultural trends—it has that “you know it when you hear it” quality. Crossings has that quality. And those through whom Crossings prophecy comes (even that hi-pitched voice who throws Gospel-wallets at clueless students) [=a classroom trick of EHS when he was younger and more foolish] are what prophets look like today. Thanks, Ed and all who contribute to Crossings! Many join me in looking forward to the millennium mark!

Paul Rowold
Polson, Montana

10. BILL BURROWS

As I've read Ed's Thursday Theology notes, I've been undergoing a slow conversion to seeing “promise” as key to the meaning of the gospel and the church's mission. Sitting in church one Sunday in the Fall of 2007, as I listened to readings taken from Isaiah, Paul, and Luke, it hit me hard that promise is one of the key elements uniting the two testaments. Ed's espousal of that theme hit home in a quiet moment, and I realized that it wasn't Ed saying this to me. The Holy Spirit was, too. And as I was reading the Canons on the Sacraments in General from the Council of Trent one day more recently, it dawned on me that the theologians of Trent had a pretty fair idea of what was key to Brother Martin. It was amazing how they stated clearly Luther's position in Canon 8 (accepted in

1547). I think they realized that if he were right, the entire sacerdotal system needed to be revisioned and revised. The canon states: "If any one says that through the sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred by the performance of the rite itself (ex opere operato) but that faith alone in the divine promise is sufficient to obtain grace, anathema sit!" Returning to the truth that what we are responding to in faith is the "who" behind God's promise would have propelled Catholics to leave the semi-magical realm of mythic sacerdotal arcana into the realm of the community and the individual responding in trust to God's Word. Had we (Protestants and Catholics) been capable of dialoguing about that presupposition, the Reformation could have become the beginning of a reformation of the whole church and not forced to become a breakaway movement. The one who writes these words is a Roman Catholic, I should confess.

And I think it's important to understand that responding to promises embodied in rites can be at least as powerful as responding to words. The whole church needs a renewal of worship because one of the negative things that's happened since the Reformation is the domination by professional theologians of who gets to say what counts. Theologians are mostly good people but they make their living piling word upon word upon word, and have themselves become a new hierarchy, extremely jealous when their own guild's authority is challenged. The result in both Protestantism and Catholicism is a too frequent inability to recognize or respect the mysterious process whereby the Spirit empowers either the rites or/and words – alone or together – to embody the Word and draw the seer and hearer to the God whose second self is the Word incarnate mediated by God's third self, the Holy Spirit. (I borrow here the wonderful phraseology of Bishop N T

Wright.)

Ed Schroeder and Thursday Theology's "Tischreden" have become a wonderful companion for this seeker who seeks to draw forth wisdom from both the Reformation and Roman Catholic traditions in much the way the wise householder draws out both old things and new from his warehouse (Matthew 13: 52).

Bill Burrows, Managing Editor

Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY

11. ALBERT JABS

Fear and hope...the diapason of all history...the fears and hopes of all the years...beginnings and endings...by the Holy Spirit's prompting...may even in this short paragraph...capture on cyberspace...in the waning hours of the old and new year...a luminous Eternal Light of Christ...that half of a thousand messages and reflecting millions of words that...deep darkness cannot diminish. Dr. Albert E. Jabs,

Lexington, South Carolina

12. STEVE HITCHCOCK

I've had the good fortune to have been a student of Ed Schroeder's for 40 years now – starting out as newly-minted 18-year old in a freshman theology course at Valparaiso University. I graduated from Seminex and spent another five years working for "church-related organizations." The rest of the time, I've worked as an executive in two small companies engaged in publishing and consulting. Somehow, thanks in large part to Ed, I've been able to continue my theological education, reading publications and at least a couple books each year. I've also participated in a small Lutheran parish that hangs on

to the very edges of American Lutheranism, in Berkeley, California.

I say all of this not to brag but to provide some context for my contribution to Thursday Theology 500. My hope is that my three observations will provoke commentary from Ed or from others in the Thursday Theology “seminar.”

1. It wasn't until 2001, when I read Bernard Lohse's Martin Luther's Theology, that I “understood” justification by faith (i.e. hanging on to Christ) – the heart of Luther's theology. I'm sure that I experienced saving faith many times before that “Aha!” But it certainly took a long time to sink in. From a few of my seminary classmates whom I've kept in touch with, I know many others don't organize their ministries around a law-gospel/threat-promise hermeneutic. My question is, “Why is all this very good news so difficult to comprehend?” Ed makes it all seem so simple and practical when he writes or talks, but few others do. Shouldn't “justification by faith” be more immediately accessible?
2. My other observation from the edges of the Lutheran world is that sustaining a life of faith takes time and intentionality. In this society at this time, other messages and other activities overwhelm and contradict any good news that is spoken. One solution is to remove oneself – at least for a time. The good news seems so much more winsome in places like Holden, Lutheran School of Theology, or the dozen or so (maybe 100) of “lively parishes” that encourage worship, study, and reflection. Isn't this a rather fragile foundation for the Gospel? With such small and segregated outposts, how can the good news be heard and believed here in the United

States?

3. My third observation is that this believing business has become professionalized. In the congregation where I worship, at least two-thirds of the members are clergy, were once clergy, were at least theologically educated, married to clergy, or have parents or siblings who were are clergy. In my daily life work, I'm involved in lots of nonprofit organizations, some of them church-related. I'm struck that clergy are over-represented in these organizations. Can the institutional church, to say nothing of the Gospel, continue if it is just a professional association of theologically-trained individuals and their relatives?

Perhaps the question behind these three questions is how can a threat-promise theology engage the larger culture in which we live here in the United States? What words, stories, and concepts can make this more than the work of a professional guild that has the time and temperament for what seems to be intellectually challenging? How can more people – who rush about in our consumer society with hardly any biblical literacy and certainly no liturgical refinement – hear the good news that creates the faith that saves?

13. RICHARD KOENIG

“Particularly for those called to a life of ministry within the church, 2 Timothy poses some powerful challenges. It proposes that ministry is not a career choice, but a call from God to become holy. Neither is ministry a body of lore to communicate or a set of skills to exercise, but a matter of living in a certain manner that expresses one’s deepest convictions in consistent patterns of behavior. Transformation of character or, if

one prefers, continuing conversion is the very essence of ministry, as it is of discipleship. Carrying out acts of ministry without the corresponding affections is a form of counterfeiting, to 'have the form of piety while denying its power' (3:5). Ministry, furthermore, is not measured by success, but by fidelity. Ministry demands witnessing to uncomfortable and unpopular truths in the face of indifference and disagreement. Ministry inevitably involves suffering if the gospel is truly lived and rightly proclaimed. The minister labors in a hope not of reward or recognition in this life but in a hope of sharing the resurrection life. Not one of these truths is supported by present-day culture. Few of them are supported by the church. The voice of 2 Timothy is not a voice that lulls Christians into a comfortable security, but one that speaks with the urgency of prophecy, calling for witnesses to truth in an age that prefers teachers who cater to its desires (4:3)."(L.T. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 35A), New York, Doubleday, 2001, p. 330)

A quote shared by Richard Koenig, Cromwell, Connecticut, for Thursday Theology #500 for January 10, 2008

14. FREDERICK NIEDNER

Just a line for the ThTh #500. . . I do aerobics and weight training three or four times a week to keep the ticker ticking and arthritis at bay. Atrophy will never be my friend. In an analogous way, Thursday Theology serves as a weekly exercise regimen that keeps certain theological muscles working and a handful of counter-intuitive implications of genuine gospel hanging like frontlets before my adamic, opinio-legis-loving eyes. After all

these years, it's still a daily surprise to discover what all I don't have to believe if I seek Truth in the theology of the cross and the foolishness of the gospel.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for the preceding 499 Thursday offerings, and all those yet to come.

Frederick Niedner
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