

Part Two of “Werner Elert and Moral Decay in the ELCA!”

Colleagues,

Here are some response that have come in after last week’s Part One on the topic above.

A. ELCA pastor I read Root’s piece [in the blog] and some of the responses to it earlier this week, and my sneaking suspicion is that Root is headed to where the Roman Catholics have always been regarding the Reformation “aha” (including, in my opinion, in the JDDJ) [=Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification] saying, “yes, but.”

Yes, Justification by faith, but, it can’t be “only faith.” That’s not enough, or it’s too easy. You also need something else, or people won’t behave. So it is with others who bemoan the ELCA supposed departure from the “Great Tradition” of the Christian Church (which, as far as I can tell, subsists solely in unswerving opposition to homosexuality).

B. ELCA pastor It seems to me that the critics of Elert are ironically critics of Lutheranism. The heart of Lutheranism IS justification. Roman Catholics, I am told, see justification as one of many doctrines, not the central one. To claim that Elert is monomaniacal re justification is actually a compliment. It points to his Lutheranism. On the other hand, it seems that those who see gnosticism and dare I say, antinomianism, in Elert are actually siding with Roman Catholic natural law and ethics.

C. ELCA layman. I see the villianization of Elert as hope. For

a few reasons: if people like Benne are laying out Elert as a misleading force within Lutheranism, those who fundamentally disagree with Benne are going to be way more likely to want to learn about who Elert was and what he thought. If anything, he (and people like him) are trying to impose Elert on those elements of the ELCA they don't like. Good for him! If our attempts to talk about what Elert contributed to Lutheranism fall on deaf ears, maybe they'll be more likely listen when he's pulled out as a potential strawman for their arguments. The enemy of my enemy is my friend and all that. I think it's also good that people like Benne recognize Elert as a problem to their theology. This bit from Benne illustrates his chilling outline of what Lutheranism ought to be like (and how they're going to do CORE right):

They cannot reconcile Elert with their views, so they must reject him. At least on some level, they DO understand Elert, even though they identify him with an incorrect view of Lutheranism—one that makes biblicism untenable.

D. ELCA pastor After reading what Benne and Root said, I am driven down with sorrow. Root is a fine man with whom I have had some really good moments. Benne is, well, Benne, but he means well. I respected them both. But they are now revealed as following the pattern of Bill Lazareth [1928 – 2008], old LCA-types who can't get Law out of their heads. I wonder how it turned out that we ended up where we are in the ELCA.

So much from last week's responses.

At the end of last week's ThTh post I told you about another Elert-critic, Robert Benne (like Root an ELCA major leaguer), and his article in the current number of Lutheran Forum. In this article Benne even mentions my name as another subversive infecting the ELCA with what he calls "Elert's gravely flawed

construal of Luther and Lutheranism.”

And at the very very end I gave you a riddle:

“For next week’s ThTh, more on Benne’s article, wherein I intend (in a sidebar) to identify the primal “villain” who brought Elert into 20th century American Lutheranism. Was not Forde, nor me, but ironically a bloke who once taught at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, the very same ELCA seminary where two of the most vociferous Elert-critics are now tenured profs.” Who is that mystery man?

Answer: It is Robert C. Schultz. And the grey eminence behind Schultz is Jaroslav J. Pelikan. If it hadn’t been for Pelikan, Elert would never have gotten to America! If it hadn’t been for Pelikan, Bob Schultz would never have gone to Erlangen to do a doctorate under Elert beginning in 1952. Here’s how that computes. Pelikan taught at Concordia Seminary (St.Louis) for only two—possibly three—years (1950 to 52, or maybe 53). Schultz’s last year at Concordia (1951-52) was one of those Pelikan years. Schultz, along with the rest of us, got exposed to Pelikan’s hype for Elert and his recommendation that if we were thinking about graduate school in systematic theology and were serious about Lutheran confessional theology, we would, of course, first have to learn German and then we should go to Erlangen and listen to Elert. Why Elert? Because he was the doyen of Lutheran confessional theology and he did NOT have the Missouri Synod hang-up of verbal inspiration.

Schultz, pious LCMS lad, obedient to his teachers—especially such a super-teacher as Pelikan—received his B.D. degree in ’52, finessed a scholarship and went to Erlangen to sit at Elert’s feet. Four years later (1956), and now be-doctored, Bob is looking for work. O.P.Kretzmann, president of Valparaiso University, having discovered Schultz at Erlangen during his own

junket to Germany in the summer of 1953, hires Bob to come and teach the Lutheran confessional theology he's learned at Erlangen (without the verbal inspiration hang-up!)—to the (mostly “Missouri”) undergraduates at Valpo.

But Bob doesn't confine his activity to the classroom. No shrinking violet, and conscious of the tiger now in his tank—especially within American Lutheranism—he also starts publishing in English what he's learned in German wherever he gets a chance. He hustles up a “Walther-renaissance” in the LCMS focused on that Missouri Synod patriarch's own book on Law and Gospel, which book Bob Bertram's grandfather W.H.T. Dau had put into English. And somewhere along the line at Valpo Bob is asked to create the prototype of a theology curriculum for college students, wherein law-gospel-hermeneutics would not only be taught to freshman(!) for how to read the Bible, but would also be put to use as the “chromosomal structure” [thank you, Oswald Bayer, for that term] for doing theology across the board—also ethics!

And thus unwittingly the Crossings Community was born.

So there you have it, ELCA Elert-critics. The names in the rogues gallery that you need to go after begin with Bob Schultz. But behind him in this cabal are significant others: Pelikan, Kretzmann, Walther, Bertram's grandfather, Bertram himself. Bob Schultz is the only one still alive. So you better hurry up. Last month he turned 82.

Schultz was not universally acclaimed—to put it mildly—in the LCMS. Nor was Valpo's theology department. After some “unpleasantness,” Bob moved into the LCA and eventually was asked to join the faculty at Lutheran Southern Theological Seminary, where some of you unhappy campers now teach. Perhaps it's Elertiana still in the woodwork at LSTS that triggers your

dismay. Possibly also in some of the alumni.

After that sortie to round up the (un)usual suspects, let's turn to Robert Benne's article. It comes in three sections. In the second of three he goes after Elert. Here's the full text of that section. The bracketed numbers indicate places where I have something to say after you've read Benne's prose.

THE HAZARDS OF LUTHERAN DISTINCTIVES [1]

By Robert Benne

LUTHERAN FORUM (winter 2009) pp. 45-48.

[Section II, pp.47-48]

A Lutheran temptation has been to take the "doctrine upon which the church stands or falls"—justification—as the only doctrine that the church has. [2] The doctrine of the justification of sinners on account of Christ has often been elevated so far above [3] the doctrines of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit that Lutherans have sometimes justly been charged with "christomonism." Such a Second Article reductionism marginalizes [4] the role of God the Father – the creating, sustaining, covenant-making, commandment-giving, judging, first person of the Trinity – and of God the Holy Spirit – the third person of the Trinity Who calls and sustains the church, brings us to repentance and grace, joins us to the Body of Christ, gives us purpose, and sanctifies both the church and Christian persons. Without the full trinitarian content of the faith, justification easily leads to cheap grace and antinomianism, if not to total unintelligibility. [5]

This Lutheran tendency to absolutize justification has not leaped into our theology overnight. The existentialist reading of Luther led in that direction, strengthened by a certain contempt among German Lutheran theologians for the Old Testament. [6]

"Partly by historical romancing, partly, and even worse, by

following certain secular and especially nationalistic moods and tendencies, a type of "Calvinism" and "Lutheranism" was conjured up which secretly at first, but later quite explicitly, was very different from anything that Calvin and Luther and the old Calvinists and Lutherans ever have dreamt of (except perhaps in occasional nightmares)." –Karl Barth, Church Dogmatic 1:2, 836-837.

Was Barth talking about Werner Elert, [7] the great Erlangen theological ethicist, whose writings exerted the most important influence on Concordia Theological Seminary students in the years prior to the "Great Unpleasantness"? So avers Gregory Fryer, [8] a learned ELCA pastor in Manhattan, who has written a marvelous treatise [9] the sources of ELCA antinomianism. Fryer argues that Elert had a particular – and gravely flawed – construal of Luther and Lutheranism that heavily influenced the post-1970s generation of Missouri Synod refugees who are now in positions of ecclesial and theological leadership in the ELCA. [10] The essence of that construal was an almost monomaniacal focus on justification, to the exclusion of other crucial Christian doctrines.[11]

Elert's method began with the 'Urerlebnis' (primal experience) of dread before God, not necessarily because of one's sins but because of the nature of God and His commandments. Standing before God leads to "the dread one has when in the night suddenly two demonic eyes stare at him – eyes which paralyze him into immobility and fill him with the certainty that these are the eyes of him who will kill you in this very hour." –Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 20.

Who is this horrible killer? It is the one who puts humans under obligation but then binds their wills so they cannot do what is commanded. It is God! [12]

“Only when man can no longer be in doubt as to the mysterious power that binds him unconditionally and therefore keeps him from doing what he should does this knowledge become terrible in full measure. It is God himself.” –Ibid., 22. [13]“God creates man in such a way that he is able to fight against Him, yes, to hate Him for placing man in such a gruesome condition. As a result, God Himself must reply to this with death and destruction.” –Ibid., 32. [14]

Ah, but then there is the wonderful news of the gospel. The unmerited free grace of Christ frees us from this terrible God and His commandments. [15] Such is the rationale that can lead Edward Schroeder (a chief articulator of the Elertian heritage) to argue that once the gospel releases us we can freely say goodbye to the moral structures of the law that bore down on us so malevolently.[16] Thus, he argues that the created structures that augur for heterosexual marriage can be transcended by the freedom granted to us by the gospel. [17] It enables us to say farewell to bondage to the law both as accuser AND as guide.[18]

The newly-appointed Sexuality Statement exhibits this kind of Lutheran antinomianism. (It should be noted that elite Lutherans are only antinomian with regard to personal life, where biblical commandments are relatively clear; but with regard to social and political ethics, where it is notoriously difficult to gain any sort of Christian consensus, they claim clear perception of God’s will.) The statement signals that the only unity we need concerns justification. Issues having to do with the commandments of God the Father or the Holy Spirit’s work in us so that we might “delight in His will and walk in His ways” are secondary. Disagreement about them ought not to be church-dividing. [19]

The Statement wipes out any real role for the law of God, either

as the divine commands that demand repentance or as the guide for a godly life. [20] It denies the lawful forms given by God to marriage, to the complementarity of the sexes, and to the family. Because of the statement's incoherence, it is difficult to discern whether such lawlessness and formlessness are conjured up as a strategy to make homosexual relationships morally licit, or whether there is an underlying Elertian theological ethic at work. [21] In any case, the effect is the same. There is reason to suspect that the Book of Faith initiative may well be used to push forward a "distinctively" Lutheran hermeneutic, that is, one in which justification is the only crucial message of Scripture. [22]

There are other Lutheran distinctives that are subversive if accentuated at the expense of other Christian perspectives. [23] Sole emphasis on the law / gospel dialectic mutes the role of the Holy Spirit. [24] "Simul justus et peccator" is another Lutheran distinctive that can become hazardous. [25] If that profound doctrine gives permission to become complacent in recurring and habitual sins, its accentuation diminishes the Christian life. Lutheran Christians should be able to wrestle more vigorously with specific sins – lust, gluttony, judgmentalism, pride – than our tradition has allowed. [26] Such a struggle could lead to progress in the Christian life, [27] a notion seemingly abhorrent to Lutherans. [28]

Some thoughts about Benne's text

1. The one thing "distinctive" about their confession, said the Augsburg Confessors, was the way they read the Bible, namely, their law/promise hermeneutic (as we'd label it today).. Article 4 of the Apology makes that point in responding to the first wave of criticism that came from papal theologians. The alternative "distinctive," they said was to read the Bible with

God's law dominating everything so that in the end the promise got lost. By using that distinctive law/promise way of reading the Bible, justification by faith alone popped up from the pages. Luther says the same thing in his famous TableTalk # 5518. The "Aha!" came when he learned to "discriminate" (his actual Latin term) between law and gospel. From that discrimination "faith-alone" righteousness followed.

2. The one and only doctrine.

My first seminary course in the Lutheran Confessions was taught by Pelikan. He drummed home to us the significance of the singular noun in the expression "doctrina evangelii" (the doctrine of the gospel) in Augsburg Confession, Article 7. He told us: There is only one doctrine in the Christian faith according to the AC, the "doctrina" (teaching) that IS the "evangelium," the Good News. So why then 28 individual articles in the AC? These 28 articles "articulate" (pun intended from the Latin meaning of articulus, "joint") the connection, the joining, of that one doctrina to the various topics in Christian discourse.

In our LCMS tradition we'd learned to organize doctrines linearly. First in line was the verbally inspired Bible, then God, then creation, then anthropology, then sin . . . and so on. A clothesline model for understanding all the Bible doctrines. Note the plural, doctrines. Not so the AC. The AC works with a circle. Think of an old wagon wheel. The center, the hub is The Gospel: sinners being rescued by trusting the crucified and risen Jesus. In shorthand "justification by faith alone." A wheel has only one hub. The 28 articles of the AC are spokes of the wheel. Each one articulates the "joint" between the gospel hub and a specific topic of Christian faith and life. So, even on the topic of "sin," says the AC, when you talk about sin you must speak of it in this way in order not to lose the

Gospel. Any spoke of “sin-talk” that cannot be grounded back into the Gospel hub is off-limits for Christian theology. Ditto for the spokes of good works, church, sacraments, church government, etc.

[The 28 articles of the AC are often single brief paragraphs and the “joint” between spoke and hub is not spelled out. But when you get to the Apology, where the confessors had to defend what they said in the AC, that spoke-and=hub item is THE agenda. “Here’s how this spoke fits into the doctrina evangelii hub. AND here’s how your spoke does not.”]

3. Not “far above,” just at the center. The hub of the wheel. Possibly even better, the axle on which the entire wheel of theology turns.

4. How could hyping this one doctrine, this Christic salvation center, “marginalize” the Trinity? This doctrina is the Trinity’s project, the opus proprium of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Such a charge sounds like linear theology again—each of many doctrines getting their fair share of attention. What does it mean to give “fair share” of attention to each of many doctrines? Doesn’t such theology run on an axle different from the one “doctrina evangelii”? To see how Luther articulates the “Trinity-spoke” when it’s grounded in the Gospel-hub we need to go to the Large Catechism in the Lutheran Confessions, to its section on the Creed. There Luther articulates a trinitarian theology grounded in the Gospel. His proposal: Here’s how Christians talk about the Triune God so that it comes out as Good News.

5. “The full trinitarian content of the faith.” I wonder what that full content might be. What might there be to trusting the trinity that goes beyond the justification hub? Is there more promise, different promise, than the Trinity’s promise offered

in this alleged “Christocentric monism”? Are there additional doctrines that we MUST believe?.

6. “This Lutheran tendency to absolutize justification” did not come from “existentialist reading of Luther” nor from “contempt among German Lutheran theologians for the Old Testament.” It comes from the Augsburg Confession and Apology with its law/promise hermeneutic which leads to the one doctrina evangelii as the absolute center. I wonder who those unnamed bad guys are. But whoever they are, they are not at fault. It is the Augsburg Confessors who are at fault. Is their confession faulty? Within hours after they originally presented it in 1530, there were many who said so.

7. Elert and Barth were contemporaries (born in 1885 and 1886, respectively) and constant critics of each other’s view on law and Gospel. The Barth citation above is probably directed against Elert. But for Barth to say that Elert’s “‘Lutheranism’ . . . was very different from anything that . . . Luther . . . ever dreamt of (except perhaps in occasional nightmares),” reflects Barth’s own nightmare about Luther. He claimed over and over again that Luther had gotten Law and Gospel wrong. He wrote a whole book about it. It should be Gospel first, said Barth, and then, after the Gospel has rescued us, we can finally fulfill God’s law. Barth’s proposed sequence would give Luther nightmares because here God’s law has the last word.

8. “Elert . . . exerted the most important influence on Concordia Theological Seminary students in the years prior to the ‘Great Unpleasantness’? So avers Gregory Fryer.” Not true. The young exegetes with their Harvard Ph.D’s were all the rage. Theirs was the “most important” influence I know. I was there. Systematic theology was second string—if even that—and Elert not the major voice.

9. I have a copy of Fryer's 289-page treatise. It is not marvelous. It is gravely flawed in what it presents as Elert's theology. It begins by reporting on three of Fryer's neighboring ELCA pastors in the Metro New York synod, all of them Seminex alumni. "All three are antinomians. They learned it from Elert at Seminex. I'll now show you." What he then seeks to show us is that his heroes, Piepkorn and Jenson, are creedal catholic theologians and Elert is not, and the end product is antinomianism. What more needs to be said?

10. "Elert . . . heavily influenced the post-1970s generation of Missouri Synod refugees who are now in positions of ecclesial and theological leadership in the ELCA." Where are those Elert-tainted leaders? One ELCA seminary president is a Seminex grad (possibly more a Bonhoefferian than an Elertian), and over the years several have been elected ELCA bishops in local synods. But I'm still waiting for the first publication coming from the ELCA headquarters on Higgins Rd.—from any department there—where you can sniff any essence d'Elert. The long string of publications from the sexuality study group contradicted Elert's ethics hip and thigh—even and especially when they tried to talk law and gospel. More than once I sent in Elertiana alternatives to that group and was finally instructed to hold my peace.

11. Elert's "gravely flawed construal of Luther and Lutheranism . . . the essence of that construal was an almost monomaniacal focus on justification, to the exclusion of other crucial Christian doctrines." Benne takes Fryer's verdict and makes it his own. Those are hefty charges. But are they true? Perhaps there IS monomania in the works here, but it's not on Elert's side.

Gravely flawed because of his "almost" monomaniacal focus on justification. How much monomania is "almost" monomaniacal? How much, how little, focus on justification is the right amount to

avoid monomania? Is the AC also “almost monomaniacal” with its claim that there is only one doctrina, justification sola fide, in the whole of Christian theology? Was Pelikan also a madman to call this to our attention way back then?

Seems to me that Elert’s alleged “construal” is no more monomaniacal than St. Paul was when “most excellent Festus” called him a maniac way at the end of the Book of Acts? “You are mad, Paul.” (The Greek word is “maniac.”) Paul’s rejoinder about his own justification-monomania is encouraging: “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth.” Perhaps the debate with Elert-s critics is simply this, a debate with the Augsburg Confession and its claim that justification by faith alone is the one single “doctrina evangelii.” Is that madness or is it the sober truth?

And then the absurd charge that Elert’s monomania leads to his “excluding other crucial (sic!) Christian doctrines”? Did Benne or Fryer ever look at Elert’s textbook on Christian doctrine [The Christian Faith, 1940] running 679 pages? [Bob Schultz and I (Dick Baepler too) heard it delivered “live” 57 years ago at Erlangen University.] The table of contents lists individual chapters on 18 major doctrinal topics with 94 sub-sections. I wonder what the “grave flaw” is in this textbook, which then led Elert to the “exclusion of other crucial Christian doctrines.” To call Elert monomaniacal is an ad hominem argument. To say he excludes crucial Christian doctrines is an argument from ignorance.

12, 13, 14. Here Elert is repeating (almost verbatim) Luther’s own words in his classic treatise on the Bondage of the Will in his debate with Erasmus. The tone of ridicule surfaces, so it seems to me, in Benne’s prose here. In a similar way Erasmus ridiculed Luther’s proposal in this treatise that there is “no exit” from the wrath of God until Christ enters the scene. So

Luther or Erasmus—who was speaking the sober truth?

15. It's hard for me not to read these words as continuing ridicule, making Christ's rescue of sinners from the wrath of God sound "almost" facetious. And then to conclude that Christ's entry into the scene (ala Elert) "frees us from God's commandments" is not only a non-sequitur, but a flat-out contradiction to what Elert says in his ethics book. However, by mentioning God's commandments at this point, Benne is possibly tipping his hand. Is he heading where that pastor above commented—"can't get the Law out of their heads." It finally has the last word.

16, 17, 18. What Benne says in these three sentences is untrue in every case. He is (unwittingly, I hope) bearing false witness against me. I have never "argued" for the homosexual cause by any of these lines of reasoning that he predicates to me. He could not possibly have gotten to these conclusions from anything I have written or said on the subject. I wonder where he got the data that he puts into my mouth. What I have said on the topic is spelled out in an essay on the Crossings web site titled: "Reformation Resources: Law/Promise Hermeneutics & the Godly Secularity of Sex." My argument for God's own affirmation of homosexuals is based on God's law, not Christ's Gospel. The law of creation. Yes, I did come to understand that law of creation from Elert. He showed me how he had learned it from Luther's scriptural understanding of God's work as creator. At [18] Benne once more tips his hand. He desires the law to be retained as "guide" for the Christian life. It's the old debate on "third use of the law." Benne's for it. I'm against it. Luther was against it too. Ditto for St. Paul and St. John. Main reason for rejecting the law as guide for Christ-trusters is that with the Gospel you get a "guide," qualitatively different from Moses, for living the life of faith. That new guide Christ himself as Lord and his Holying Spirit as advocate. "I am with

you always,” Jesus says, not Moses. To backslide to Moses for Christian ethics is also to slide away from Christ. That’s what Paul had to tell the Galatians.

19, 20, 21. The Sexuality Statement is not good Lutheran theology in my judgment. But its serious defects are not the ones that vex Benne. It is the absence of a Lutheran theology of creation that Elert would point to as its major defect, not its attempt to ground sexual ethics from the Gospel—which is bad indeed. But to suggest that there may be an “Elertian theological ethic at work here,” when this statement ignores/contradicts what Elert sees as fundamental in “ethics under God’s law,” is to be clueless about Elert’s theological ethic and how it “works.”

22. The continuing complaint about “justification [as] the only crucial message of Scripture” surfaces again. Someone should organize a conference, an old-fashioned Reformation-era disputation, with Bob Benne and Bob Schultz as the disputants.

Thesis: The Gospel of justification by faith alone is the one and only “doctrina” in Christian theology.

Benne: That is the key problem in the ELCA.

Schultz: That is the solution to the key problem in the ELCA.

I’d gladly pay my own way to attend that one.

23. Distinctives again. See [1] above.

24. Luther said just the opposite. So did Augsburg. So does John’s Gospel. The Holy Spirit is the primal “Christ-pusher,” the prime mover in “Christum treiben.” When you do not operate “solely” with law/promise hermeneutics (so says Apology IV), you inevitably wind up “pushing” some “other gospel” with law at its base, thus thwarting the primal agenda of the Holy Spirit.

25, 26, 27. Benne's caveats about "Simul justus et peccator" echo the Roman Catholic unhappiness with this Lutheran claim that the sinner never disappears in the earthly biography of every Christ-truster. The folks responding to last week's ThTh post and quoted way at the beginning of this post—A), B), and D)—detected this in Michael Root's message.

Roman theologians were unhappy with the sola fide of the AC for the same reasons, the same reasons that Benne cites as his own: "gives permission to become complacent in recurring and habitual sins." He's looking for "progress in the Christian life . . .to wrestle more vigorously with specific sins – lust, gluttony, judgmentalism, pride."

Two items give pause here: the notion of progress, the focus on sins and not sin itself. The Roman critics of the Aug. Conf. found the AC defective in these two points as well. Their proposal was to reinvigorate the law and its commandments. How far from that is Benne's prose? When the Apology takes up this criticism, it shows that the proposals of these initial critics do not fit into the hub of the wheel of the one doctrina evangelii. Curiously enough—though perhaps not curious at all—much of the 60 pages of the Apology's article 4 on Justification is actually spent on ethics. For that was the Roman complaint: no notion of ethical progress, no restrictions to prevent complacency about habitual sins.

Apology IV makes two fundamental points on this.

- A. One is about sin. Sin is unfaith and sins (plural) are symptoms of Sin (singular). There are no fences that can be constructed to prevent the "habitual and recurring" sin of unfaith. "Progress" in coping with sin here is not "finally I've gotten so far," but adding one more day to a biography of dying and rising with Christ. If you want to

quantify it, such “progress” goes something like this for a near-octogenarian: Today is the 28,981st day that this mortification/vivification happened to me. But there is no percentage progress or improvement that I can point to. To whittle down my sin of unfaith Christ alone must remain my mediator. Commandments, even God’s commandments, don’t do it, can’t do it. Christ-trusters this side of the grave will never “progress” to the point of no longer needing to pray: “Lord, increase our faith.”

B. So how do Augsburg’s (Lutheran) Catholics pursue ethics? Apology IV puts it this way: “we commend good works in such a way as not to remove the free promise.”

28. This notion just spelled out [in 27], this spoke, of “progress in the Christian life” is NOT “abhorrent to Lutherans.” This one-day-at-a-time progression is solidly mitered into the doctrina-evangelii hub of the wheel. If ethical proposals for progress do not “articulate” this hub, there is only one alternative hub available. In that one the free promise gets lost. That’s what’s at stake in the homosexual turmoil among Christians today. Just to raise the conflict within the ELCA to focus on the promise would be “progress” indeed.

Maybe a Benne/Schultz disputation–Bob and Bob on doctrina evangelii– would do just that for the ELCA.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder