

Reader Responses

Colleagues,

Our posting for ThTh #110 is a collection of smaller items—a mixed bag, but good stuff. After a lead-in citation from Luther there follows reader-responses to recent postings and then an insider's report from Canada.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

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1. God's law and Christian ethics: The heart of the matter.Sent in by an ELCA pastor

Luther's Sermon on I Timothy 1:8-11–

In order to understand truly how to use the Law you must divide man into 2 parts and keep the two clearly separated, namely, the old man and the new man, as St. Paul divided man. Leave the new man completely undisturbed by laws, but the old man you must unceasingly spur on with laws, and must give him no rest from them. In that way you use the Law well. The new man cannot be helped through works, he needs something higher, namely, Christ, who is neither Law nor works, but a gift and present, of sheer grace and goodness of God. When through faith He comes to dwell in your HEART, God makes you saintly. But if you should ever think of becoming acceptable through some deed of your own, such as entering some order, or pursuing some vocation, you would have failed to use the Law aright, and denied Christ. He wills to help you without any work of yours, but if you desire to help yourself through your works you have carried the Law too high and too far. For you drive Christ out of your HEART where He should be

seated and reign alone, and in His place you put the Law and your own works.

In this manner (I say) the new man carries in his HEART Christ and all His heavenly goods, and has everything he should have and is in need of nothing, whether in heaven or on earth. W.A. 17.1.122f.

2. Responses to ThTh 108 (Church discipline)

A. From a Crossings student in St. Louis: One of the best things I've ever seen on Church discipline is the book "Discipling the Brother" by Marlin Jeschke (Herald Press, Scotsdale Penn, 1972). Its subtitle is "Congregational Discipline According to the Gospel." The man himself is Mennonite, I believe, but draws from quite an array of historical sources. Another is the material called "Peace in the Parish." By an ALC pastor commissioned by LCMS! I believe our brethren in South Africa might well benefit from these sources.

B. From the bishop of an ELCA synod: Thanks for the helpful piece on discipline. This Lenten, post-Easter season, we had three cases of pastoral discipline, with a fourth one possible, all at the same time. These four situations became my "stations of the cross" this paschal season. It is the most difficult part of this calling, as I know you would already understand. TT#108 was helpful. Blessings!

C. From a Lutheran pastor in Australia: Your recent Sabbatheology on Church discipline [amongst the

Lutherans in KwaZulu-Natal] interested me personally and professionally. Personally, because our daughter is at work in KwaZulu-Natal these days; we hope to visit her in December.

Professionally, because I have trouble justifying the use of Matthew 18 to justify the practice of church discipline. In Matthew, 'Gentiles and tax collectors' are either praised or are the object of our Lord's special concern. The whole gravamen of Matt 18 is 'winning the brother/sister'. The phrase 'let him be to you as a gentile and tax collector' must mean, in Matthew's context: 'Let him be for you an object of special concern'(and so keep him within the fold; cf the contrasting ways in which Luke and Matt use the story of the lost sheep: Luke, to seek those outside and bring 'em in; Matt, to seek those inside and keep 'em in).

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3. Response to ThTh 109 (Women pastors as Christ's gifts to the church)From a Lutheran Pastor in upstate New York:
ThTh 109 is an oldie but goodie!

1. Can it be easily adapted and applied to the issue of ordaining homosexuals?
2. Two quotes:

'Does Jan's public ministry weaken the scandal of Christ's free mercy? Of course it can happen that Jan could exercise her office contrary to the forgiveness of sins. But it could never happen because she is of the wrong gender. It can only happen if she proclaims the wrong gospel. That's the only yardstick for measuring whether anyone is on the pastoral gift list.'If that Word and

Sacrament are what Christ wants served, then the re-presenting that Christ wants is happening. The gender of the representer cannot make that Word and Sacrament more or less Christ-like. For it is not his masculinity, but his mercy which is "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

I rarely if ever see such reasoning outside of Crossings.

But where was this reasoning among the ELIMites before the ELIMites faced the issue of women's ordination? Was it used elsewhere and only brought to this issue after unthinking tradition was challenged? How did it grow in your life? I ask because I grow in my own crossings.

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4. Response to Sabbatheology text studies: From a Lutheran Deaconess, now a pastor in a Canadian home for the aging: I just want to say thank you. I do greatly appreciate Crossings theology and the weekly matrix for Sabbatheology. You did a very great favor for many people when you started crossings and then gave us a way of understanding the pericopes. I've been going back to the ones from three years ago, and I'm so glad have them. As I work on sermons and messages and Bible studies for people in the home, I am more and more convinced of their need to hear the words of forgiveness and the assurance of their relationship as God's children. There are so many misunderstandings between the residents and their families, so much need for forgiveness, which sometimes doesn't happen until the funeral is being planned. A few times I've felt like I was being repetitive, but often

people will say it's just what they needed to hear. So thanks again for the theology. It's a real blessing.

5. And then another one from Canada: From a Seminex grad (1977) who "swam the Thames," as he is wont to say, and is now an Anglican priest in Canada.

Greetings from one of the Canadian Diaspora!

The reading for today from the Martyrology contained a quote from St. Isaac the Syrian which was a rather pithy summary of the theologia crucis, so of course, was reminded of you folks, hence this note. (Excuse the politically incorrect language!) "The wondrous love of God for man can most easily be perceived when a man is in such dire straits that his very hope is threatened. God thus demonstrates His power of salvation, for a man never acknowledges the power of God when he enjoys tranquillity and freedom."

The Anglican Church of Canada is preparing for its own particular crucifixion. Until the early 70's, the Canadian government hired the RC, United, and Anglican Churches to run a number of residential schools for the native peoples. They were a product of their day and present standards would not approve of the cultural oppression, racism, etc. implicit in the system. There were also instances of abuse, physical and sexual, some of which were dealt with, others not as well as one might wish. Certain abuses have recently come to light, resulting in law suits against all of the churches involved. The courts have ruled recently in a case involving the Anglican Church, that the church shared responsibility with the government for what happened, 60%-40% respectively. The litigation has been so costly, and the church can in no

way begin to meet the claims against it.

Result: unless the government steps in, the Anglican Church at the national level will have exhausted its endowments and assets by the end of the coming year, if not sooner, will be forced to declare bankruptcy, and will therefore cease to exist. Because the Ang. Church of C, hence ACC, is a federation of sovereign dioceses, unless the courts so decide, the assets of the individual dioceses will not go on the block yet. However, there are suits involving at least three of the dioceses, including the one I am in. Two dioceses will probably within the year be forced into bankruptcy, and their assets sold. The courts have yet to rule on whether the parish churches themselves are properties held in trust and thus untouchable. All other properties will be liquidated. These dioceses will then become missionary districts of the neighbouring diocese.

Our diocese has at least 12 cases against it—enough to bankrupt it, even if the decisions are in our favour. The school in our diocese was run by a missionary society out of national headquarters in Toronto and had nothing to do with us, but defense is costly. By the time the suit makes it through the courts, at the present rate, I will be just retiring before St. Luke's goes on the block.

So, the sins of the fathers are indeed visited on the children. But, as the Seminex experience reminded us—or some of us—this is where the cross shines brightest, and the loving presence of God most keenly felt. It's a time of liberation.