

Readers' Response plus Two Macedonian Calls

Colleagues,

For this week, two responses to past issues of ThTh plus two Macedonian calls.

Peace & Joy! Ed

A. THE TWO MACEDONIAN CALLS—

1. First one comes from Klaipeda, LITHUANIA.

In 1997 Marie and I were ELCA “mission volunteer” working at the Protestant Seminary in Klaipeda. For English-language worship and nurture Marie and I joined in Sunday evening worship with the folks at Lithuanian Christian College [LCC]. We’re still in contact with a number of them. LCC staffers are mostly volunteers, folks who call themselves evangelicals, most of them from Canada & USA. The college’s roots are Mennonite. Here’s the actual call—

“I am writing mostly to ask that whatever prayer circles you have please add to their list our faculty need for NEXT semester, which begins Jan. 14! We have NO teacher for our Western Civ. class of 160 students! The course has been taught this semester by the president of the school, but his travel schedule next semester makes that impossible. We are looking for a retired or on sabbatical college professor of history or a practiced high school teacher of history with an MA. This is one of the core courses for our freshmen, and the need is urgent. Of course, if you

or anyone in the congregation has any ideas of whom we might contact, (please contact the Crossings Community at our [email address](#).) Then I'll be back here in Lithuania."

This plea comes from Crossings colleague and dear personal friend, Jane Holslag. Jane's a pastor in the PC-USA, now in her third year teaching at LCC. Contact us too, please, if you have any leads.

2. Second one is from NIGERIA (via Australia!)
Brian Schwarz, Lutheran mission exec downunder writes:

"I participated in a WCC-sponsored Multicultural Ministry conference in Sydney. There I met a pastor from the Church of Christ, a Nigerian African Independent Church. He asked me what kind of help I could give his church, which is just starting its own seminary. I offered some books and possible contacts. Do you know anyone else who might be interested in a stint in Nigeria? Does the ELCA have a program of aid for this kind of church? I'd be pleased to hear from you anything that might be helpful for this man and his church."

If you have something for Brian on this, E-mail us at info@crossings.org

- B. A RESPONSE TO THTH 74 "PREACHING THE NAME"[I have been unable to contact the author (a ThTh subscriber), who sent me this via snail-mail, to get permission to print his name. It's clear that he wants to add this piece to our ThTh conversation. So this much for now: the author is an erstwhile dean of an Episcopal cathedral in the USA.]

"Thanks to a former student of yours and mine, [name], I got hold of your marvelous piece on a Reformation view of homosexuality, a piece I shared with Bishop [so-and-so]. I have since subscribed to Sabbatheology and am being enriched by it."Your piece on Preaching The Name was very, very good. I agree with all of it save this: I am not sure the fault lies with the seminary's failure to teach good Bible and Theology, rather the seminary's failure to prepare seminarians for the real world of ministry and its stresses.

"For years I have been involved with Tavistock Group Relations training and then with the Grubb Institute, in both cases working primarily with religious leaders. From this work I have learned some interesting things about the practice of ministry in a real church which struggles to deal with the basic issue of our total dependence on the grace of God, a job it does badly because dependence is such a frightening thing to us all.

"If you want to know what I mean by dependence, think of those moments in your life when you have felt truly weak; those are dependent moments. (Paul had some things to say about being weak, that is dependent on God and therefore strong.) We are all fearful in a greater or lesser degree of this dependence. Adam and Eve hated it.

"Now go out into the real church and listen to what the clergy say: in a Grubb conference not too many years ago, the clergy spoke about the tension they felt between apostolic religion and civil religion, a tension that tore them apart.

"But more recently at a Grubb conference most of whose members were clergy in charge of large suburban

congregations, it became apparent to the staff that the clergy were in great pain, all of it unspoken. At the same time we felt they were harbouring a secret. Finally we put it all together and shared it with the membership. The pain they felt came from the necessity of keeping their faith a secret – a necessity if they were to be successful clergy.

“It is not as if only some feel this tension, this stress. We all do. The question is how much stress there is in the job and how much we can take.

“In my case I have been able to be relatively faithful because I have always worked in urban parishes where the gospel is far more welcome than in the suburbs.

“Do you remember the now very old book, The Noise of Solemn Assemblies, in which a sociologist of religion examined the question “Why don’t they practice what they preach?” only to discover that they/we do practice what we preach. It is just that in 90% of American churches what we preach is the “blessing of the OK society” (the author’s term).

“Perhaps this will enlarge the discussion a bit by confronting the real cost of discipleship and how much any of us are willing to face it.”

C. CONTINUATION OF THTH 78: AN UPDATE ON LC-MS AND JDDJ
Last week’s ThTh 78 discussed a widely-publicized statement from the President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod about the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.”

1. First some more accurate data–

Some of the background information I posted to you

last week (ThTH 78) was not on target. Since then I've learned this: the name of the LC-MS-sponsored international network of Lutherans is "The International Lutheran Council" [ILC] and not Lutheran World Conference, as I guessed it was. The ILC has approx. 3.5 million members, 80% of whom are in the LC-MS. Member church bodies in the ILC total 30-plus. Some ILC churches also affiliate with the Lutheran World Federation. Their publication is "The ILC News." Its current editor is a pastor in South Africa.

2. Today (Dec. 16, 1999) this letter to the editor appeared in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

"A large ad in the Dec. 9 Post-Dispatch and other major newspapers criticizing the international Lutheran-Roman Catholic agreement on the doctrine of justification appeared to speak for The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod." As the immediate past president of that church body, I want to assure your readers that the ad does not present the official position of the church body on that agreement, nor was its content or placement authorized or approved by any official board, commission, council, agency, or convention of the church body. In reality, the ad represents the personal opinion of the current president, and it was paid for by a private contribution, not church body funds.

"I know of no one in our church body who would disagree with the ad's statement on the Gospel of Jesus Christ or its promise to work toward reconciliation among Christians. However, the fact is that thousands of members and congregations of

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod are chagrined by the ad, not only because of its misleading statements about the joint agreement as well as the position of the Roman Catholic Church, but also because ads in the public media are not a helpful way for church bodies to deal with their differences.

“To all who may have been offended by this ad, I offer this unofficial but very profound apology and assure you that the vast majority of the 2.6 million members of our church body continue to regard all fellow Christians with friendship and good will, and to rejoice whenever there is progress in resolving the doctrinal differences that have divided us over the years.”

*Dr. Ralph A. Bohlmann, President Emeritus
The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*

3. Stay tuned.