

Responses received to the last two postings: “9-11 on the Third Anniversary” (ThTh 327) and “THE LUTHERAN surrenders ” (ThTh 328).

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

I. “9-11 on the Third Anniversary” (ThTh 327)THREE NOT COMPLETELY HAPPY CAMPERS

1. ELCA pastor, former student—Right on – as always! The diagnosis on America is absolutely correct, although one I am reasonably sure will never usher from the mouth of a politician! However, it raised a question I have wanted to ask you for some time to make sure that I am thinking correctly.

I have often taught that God is absolutely good and that no evil can come from an all-good God. Trouble is, my hearers often cock their heads in wonderment as if I have taught a new teaching! . . . It seems so many of my hearers believe that God directly sends all kinds of evil and bad things, namely sickness, death, tragedy.

I have responded to their questions in the way I think you have addressed those things that have befallen America. I believe that God may well “use” these things to bring God’s people to their knees,

but God does not directly cause/send them.

Sin, death and the devil are the result of misused freedom and since the Fall we suffer from them and their consequences. It is out of this fallen state that suffering, sickness, and all sorts of evil come. The Good God is with us to see us through these things and may even use them in our lives to bring us back to Him.

Yes/No?

2. A first cousin—Ed, aren't you being one-sided? What about those people murdering in the name of Allah? Don't they need to be called to repent too?
3. A Crossings colleague—Where's the Good News Prognosis stuff to meet the Bad News Diagnosis that you keep pounding away at in ThTh 327? Even Jeremiah with all his gloom and doom has a chapter 31 with Good News for the villains.

SOME DID HEAR GOOD NEWS

1. One of my own teachers (philosophy) at Valparaiso University in the late 1940s. [D.v., I'm soon to be 74. Imagine his antiquity!]Ed: Eucharisto polu [Ed: That's Greek for I give great thanks] for this cup of water in the desert.

You recall for us the tower of Siloam. The required response was not merely to name a Siloam Commission, certainly not to export violence to rid the world of evil—a war without end.

You cite Amos. Yes. I've been thinking Jeremiah, who saw it happen. Remember Niebuhr's "Test of True Prophecy"? He's clearer about how it's falsified. False prophecy promises security, usually wrapped in

piety: "The temple of the Lord, ditto, ditto." ... And may God continue to bless the U.S. of A."

"Security" seems the word of the day. Preachers and candidates trade on it; Yet exactly such "security" causes deaf-dumb-and blindness to growing injustice and divisions, which cause frustration, envy, and vengeance in turn on the other side. That kind of security brings unsafety, unpeace. Jeremiah said, "Go to Shiloh and see!"—a hole in

the ground where formerly stood a people's shrine. Has no one said, "Go to the World Trade Towers and see!" Would anyone dare breathe an American Shiloh?

All that end-talk in Amos and Jeremiah—borrowed from a biblical assumption that the world had a beginning and would have an end—was used by them [sc: the security prophets] for ends "within" history and specifically for those brought by empire. (Assyria, Babylon. Daniel added Persia, Macedonia, and the Seleucids. Mark and John of Patmos were talking Rome.)

Exile was a fertile state. It produced a redaction of the scrips, brought inter-people engagement. Here people came to sing the greatest songs ever composed of a city to come. Marty has written about "pilgrims in their own land"—should we be saying "exiles in our own land," admitting a new captivity to empire? Jeremiah made no offer of simple land restitution to Israel. He spoke judgment on Judah, judgment on the nations, along the way to a future including both, to hearts of flesh and not of stone from the greatest to the least, no one any longer saying

“know the Lord.”

2. A California Deaconess—I’ve been keeping your last ThTh posting (327) for some quiet moments, and this week the quiet moments did not surface until early this morning. You remain the one consistent purveyor of the need for faith in the good news of Christ amidst the terrors of Iraq. Indeed, this empire most assuredly has had the chance to “repent and hear the good news” over and over again. It does appear that it will not, amidst the warnings. A return to our God does not seem to be in the works.

“Surrogate repentance” runs deep. In repenting, I feel as though my body is covered with a burkha. I am stifling hot in its unforgiving folds, as I peer out from the grid before my eyes. Can I see others? Not very well. Can they see me? Not at all. A whirlwind of dust—words?—gathers beneath the heavy folds everywhere I walk, stirring up the atmosphere around me. Others simply avoid my whirlwind by stepping aside as I pass. The dust stings my lungs. My heart begins to hurt. Then, on a billboard I see it flashing, “HEAR THE GOOD NEWS!” Light and love flood the very warp and weft of my garment, penetrating right through my skin and into my soul. Thank you for --being that billboard today.

II. “THE LUTHERAN surrenders ” (ThTh 328)

1. ELCA pastor in IN—Great stuff!!!! I needed that. Yes, too often THE LUTHERAN is not very Lutheran, as is all too much of the church that bears that name. I wonder if David Miller will respond to your invitation.
2. ELCA seminary prof—Thanks for continuing to be such a passionate witness of the radical good news which

is God's gospel.

3. ELCA pastor in WI—Thanks (again!) for the Gospel, Ed. There's some FUNKY theology rampant in the ELCA.
4. ELCA pastor in WA—This week's posting is, as they say, "two thumbs up—way up!" Thanks for setting the issues so clearly before the Lutheran's editor. I can hope & pray for a written response by him in a future column.
5. Holden Village supporter (also Luth. university theology prof)—Thanks for your piece on the LUTHERAN column. If someone had read that column aloud to me and not told me where it came from, I'd have guessed, with some sadness, that it had been a Vespers homily at Holden Village. That's the prevalent theology there, the sort that made [so-and-so] nearly nuts a few years ago, the sort [so-and-so] struggled against for years as Holden's director, and the sort a handful of us continually resist and try to counter or critique.
6. Another Lutheran University prof (math and English lit.)—One context for "surrender" is war: we fight and fight, until we can't fight any more and either we die or we surrender. [cf the sonnet, John Donne I think but wouldn't bet on, that begins, "Batter my heart, three-Personed God," which I admit I don't really like all that much but he's got this sense of surrender.] In that way, we fight and fight against grace because we want to do it ourselves (we want to be really, really good and earn God's favor thereby) or we want not to have to be graced (we're not really all that bad, are we?). But ultimately we can't do it ourselves and we can't get by without grace, so we die or we surrender to a God who never was fighting, just offering, just promising, only we

couldn't see it until we exhausted ourselves to the point of despair .

That wouldn't be my only choice of context for "surrender" though, and it might not be my first choice even. I think of surrender when I think of passion: sex perhaps, or any activity engaged in with total absorption, total passion, total obsession... Is that perhaps the sense David Miller had in mind in his editorial? But that's a Romantic sense of the word for sure.

I believe it was Gladstone speaking of Disraeli: "a rhetorician inebriated by his own verbosity." Maybe the roses got Miller carried away on the wings of the words and missing the Word?

7. ELCA pastor in Ohio—Thanks, Ed, for taking the time and trouble to shout into the wind. I think there's not a chance you'll reach the intended target—David Miller; whatever other official folks are busy shaping opinions without reference to the thought of the confessors and the Word that backs it up—but then perchance the wind sends your words sideways where bystanders pick up on them and are encouraged by them and put them to use. Which I assume is happening this week, also here.
8. ELCA pastor in MT—Once again, Bravo!!
9. ELCA pastor in NE—Glad you are home from the hospital and on the mend, and now have the fever to take on "THE LUTHERAN!"
10. David Miller, Editor of THE LUTHERAN, also responded. Dear Ed,
A final thought related to my last note to you [Ed: David is referring to an earlier exchange we'd had on a related topic]:

That Paul frequently and decidedly could call from the language of sacral manumission, repeatedly referring to himself as doulos (slave, not servant, as English translations so genteelly cast it) suggests again that the language of surrender, "the obedience of faith," is appropriate to explorations of the Christian life.

Peace, David

[And in a follow-up message—]

By the way, did you share my earlier response with the people on your listserve, or did they only hear your voice? I regularly run articles with which I may not personally agree and letters to the editor that take me to task, sometimes abusively.

You have my permission to share my response with your digital community.

God's peace, David