

# Responses to ThTh #179 “Repentance and Apocalypse Now”

Colleagues,

Three items of thankfulness on this USA Thanksgiving Day.

1. Money matters. [That's a subject and a verb.] Our Crossings Community thanks go to those of you who sent gifts when I mentioned our need a few weeks ago. There are still 99% of you on the listserve who haven't (yet). These postings are free, as you know. Transmission of them isn't. Additional thanks-givings welcome at: The Crossings Community, PO Box 7011, St. Louis, MO 63006-7011, USA.
2. A new book—maybe just the thing for you for Christmas. Marie and Ed Schroeder have just been “published together.” Well, sortuv. We've got 4 pages in CHRIST FOR ALL PEOPLE. CELEBRATING A WORLD OF CHRISTIAN ART. “From Brazil to Botswana, from Norway to Nepal, contemporary artists join the great masters to shed light on the Jesus story in breathtaking new ways.” It is a stunning production—ecumenically, globally, with top-quality print reproductions of the art works. The editor, Ron O'Grady of New Zealand, is one of the founders of the Asian Christian Art Association. This volume is one of many projects of the ACAA with its long record of publishing books, conducting art exhibitions, sponsoring young artists and promoting Christian art. Its headquarters are in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Schroeder involvement was modest: Marie has two photos in the volume and each of us provided a meditation for one of the artworks. Available in the USA

via Orbis Books. For more info see their webpage. For orders call 1-800-258-5838. It's hardcover, 159 pp. US\$30. Also available elsewhere in the world via co-publishers Pace Publishing, Auckland, New Zealand; Novalis, Toronto, Canada; WCC Publications, Geneva, Switzerland.

3. My own thanks for the folks who sent words of thanks in response to last week's ThTh 179. I append a few of them below.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## **Responses to Thursday Theology #179 "Repentance and Apocalypse Now"**

- I. It is interesting: now, two months after 9-11, people in our congregation are starting to resonate with repentance as a response to the terrorist attacks. I preached repentance on 9/16 and people came back the next week. I'll be preaching it again this week with Luke's gospel and the destruction of the temple – trade center/pentagon. I've been teaching a course using the Crossways Bible Time line. Since it presents a wide variety of events in scripture the participants always bring up 9-11. I see it as a wonderful opportunity to remind people of what God's ultimate will is for us: "Return to the Lord your God..."

Just to let you know who I am. I am an ELCA pastor serving a small, rural congregation. I heard about Sabbathology and Thursday Theology from my wife who heard about it from David Truemper at Valparaiso University.

Thanks for your thoughts.

1. Bravo. Esp. your update of Amos 3:3-6, wherewith the home run got hit.
2. You drove me to my favorite Reformed guy, Newbiggin, whose stuff rings with new clarity in the wake of 9/11. From his little TRUTH TO TELL, chapter 3 ("Speaking the Truth to Caesar"): "The ideology which the Barmen Declaration sought to unmask and to reject was the ideology of nation and race and blood. The ideology which we [truth-telling 1990's folks] have to recognize, unmask, and reject is an ideology of freedom, a false and idolatrous conception of freedom which equates it with the freedom of each individual to do as he or she wishes." What do your quibblers #3 not get?
3. Newbiggin somewhere tells a marvelous story—wish I could quickly put my finger on it—that he uses to describe what repentance is fundamentally about. Seems that in his days as Church of South India bishop, he was paying a visit to a village with a one-way street. The locals had organized a procession to meet him, the idea being that as he drew near the village they would parade the length of the street to meet him. Problem is, the path he was taking to the village brought him to the same end of the street where the processors had gathered. Discovering this, and recognizing the imminence of embarrassment all around, he and his entourage backtracked a little, trudged around the edge of the village and then renewed their approach from the opposite direction. This, he said, is what repentance is about: a 180 degree turn—like the younger brother turning homeward from the pig sty of

the far country; unlike the older brother who remains standing in the field with his back toward the house where the party's breaking out.

4. I very much appreciated your observation about the NT's flat "repent," minus an "of".

5. Keep it coming.

III. Ed, It is refreshing to watch your discoveries as first, the events of contemporary history, and now, the reactions of your readers to your reading of contemporary history, push you deeper into the sources. Your apologia gets richer and richer (I just finished reading ThTh-179). I recall your first "reading" of the September 11 "tea leaves" to be meek and a bit tentative. But at each re-crossing of the events of our day with the sources in the OT/NT and in the church fathers, you grow more forceful. I am reminded of the days in the early 1970's as the attacks against the St. Louis [Missouri Synod seminary] faculty grew stronger, the theology of those under attack grew sharper and more focused on the Gospel. Culminating at one point in "Faithful to our Calling, Faithful to our God". And I recall Doc Caemmerer's comment in those days, that his own personal question mark about his Lord's promise that to follow Him would entail suffering, was finally erased when Doc himself came under intense fire for living what he had preached for so many years.

I'm sure that it is interesting (maybe painful) for you to see the critiques that come now from inside the church against your reflections. It is clear to me that although you may not have a vision from heaven to promote your analysis of Sept. 11, you certainly have a long-standing call to speak News that is even better than we expect, after we have finally seen that our problem is even worse than we dared to dream. Your ThTh is very meaningful for

me. Thanks for engaging in the fracas (again),

IV. My god, you hit the nail on the head again. Repentance is a turning to the Lord because turning anywhere else is idolatrous. The church has been so lax in preaching a repentance for the forgiveness of sins the last 20-30 years that sin was so down-played that glory theology became the internal religious philosophy of the decades. And so it does seem a correct observational analysis that the what-should-we-do mentality misses the whole point of it. So Elert was correct in that ethics needs to begin in the garden/fall of humanity model with God (the critic?) announcing to Adam , "Where are you?" as the beginning point to where we address ethics. The Pelagian what-should-we-do mentality does not begin at the right place. In fact, the fault (sin) may lie in that humans seek a relationship with dos and donts rather than the primary relationship with God (either faced with God the critic in my old Adam or reaching out in pure trust to Jesus, the new Adam, a new self opened to Jesus' forgiveness in his resurrection). Just wanted to share some thoughts. I'm with you on this...go for it.

V. Ed, Just made a quick run through your latest epistle; need to read it at a slower pace, in my daily walk; good stuff, you bet. At any rate, you are not talking to the choir, you got a fighting fish by the tail, and therefore you have to keep on reeling in. Aka-repentance. Read the letters to the editor and you read about "nuke the enemy." Spend just one hour, like I did, at the Peace Park in Hiroshima, where living and dying were one, and where 120,000—they say, 200,000—were "french fried" in an instant, and one thinks differently. Therefore, keep on keeping on, and faith, of course, attracts real fire, when you get into the fat.

VI. I have been wrestling with your comments for the past 9 weeks, as I have been struggling to sort out much of the theology I've been hearing since 9-11. Most of the comments from colleagues and others have been swirling with both hubris and partisanship, and it has been difficult for me to find clarity. My own hubris and partisanship was also getting in the way of understanding where God's saving act in Christ Jesus speaks to us in these days. Thank you for this last Thursday Theology. The Summa [final paragraph of ThTh 179] finally started to break through with a clear sense of the cross. The part about national Pelagianism also started to make sense, and it ties into a religious Pelagianism I've seen in myself and colleagues as we struggle to believe the "right" thing. Don't get me wrong, I am not a relativist, but I have found myself these 9 weeks struggling to justify my existence by having the right theology.

I have found myself very frustrated with the Thursday Theology pieces the past 9 weeks, to the point of not wanting to read anymore. However, even when I disagreed, I appreciated the quality of your argument so much that I could not disregard it. Thank you for continuing this dialog. I plan to continue to read your reflections with fear and trembling, as well as gratitude and peace.

Thank you for the hard word.

VII. Anyway, I want to thank you for your last two ThTh's, especially for unveiling the "Pelagian" fallacy in the question of repenting "from what," which is nothing but an avoidance tactic for doing true repentance: repentance as "denying yourself." For one can always work on changing/veiling the fruit, and quibble about "making satisfactions," but we cannot change the "self" as known by God—and that is the focus of repentance, the self

before God. Again, many thanks.

VIII. Thanks for your drumbeat. I'm not getting bored or frustrated, but fed. As you say, "Repent" in the old book, which the new one tries to translate with "metanoia," does indeed mean turn around. Come back! Come home! Quit looking for home ever further into the darkness that can never give you arms to hold you or hands into which to rest your life at the end of your day of crossbearing (Lk 23:46). As for Luke 23 and the crucified King, that's become one of my most cherished images of the church: Some crucified folks hanging there asking, "Now what? What's next?" while much of the world stands by laughing at this foolishness, this sorry gallows humor.

We say we are crucified with Christ by baptism into his death, so that's us hanging there, too, having got what we deserve. We look like a sick comedy sketch to the world that watches this bizarre scene. Crucified folks have no future, right?

So it seems.

Hang in there, Ed. I'm off next week to [famous Lutheran venue] to lead an Advent retreat. You've helped prepare me. We'll work at repentance, at listening to the voice that calls us home. God's peace.