

Responses to “What Lutherans really believe.”

Colleagues,

ThTh 22 brings you responses to last week's edition, the report on Lutheran Brotherhood's survey of what US Lutherans say they really believe. Despite the tumult—yea, in the very face of it—Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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1. From Robin Morgan, St. Louis MO. Robin, ELCA pastor, Crossings Website Manager, is my teammate in ThTh production.

Hi, I need to say a couple of things in response to ThTh 21. I guess I didn't find that Lutheran Brotherhood news as horrifying as you did because, on a gut level, those statistics have been obvious to me ever since I've been hanging around Lutherans. Or maybe it was even more obvious before I joined the Lutheran church when I lived up in "Lutherland" of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Lutherans are really NICE. Maybe that's why I was never drawn to the church when I lived up there, I knew I wasn't nice enough to be Lutheran. Lutheranism is a lifestyle that has Jesus embedded in it, but it's the form of the culture that's the most important thing. I believe that part of our Babylonian captivity today is our ethnicity. You don't need theology of the cross inside our clean, safe German/Norwegian clubs. In fact, in trying to shake our immigrant status and be Americans, it makes sense that we'd push it away. We've become wrapped in our

prosperity just like everybody else. Living out here in the suburbs where raising children is our purpose, church going is important because that's what nice people do, but more important than that is the retention of the status quo.

My sports-loving husband helped me understand why so many people seem to have a religious passion for sports during one of the myriad of times I have griped about the immorality and stupidity of professional sports. He said that it's safe to be passionate about sports because they're really not important. You can let out your aggression, your passions because you aren't going to damage anything significant, nothing that will rock the boat of society by painting your face the colors of your team and howling like a banshee when they win...or lose.

We all seem to know, on some level, that we're living on borrowed time here in the U.S. Believing that God wants us to treat each other decently, that all major religions are speaking about the same God, that the Gospel is about rules for right living fits with our first priority – keeping the boat afloat.

Theology of the Cross is too damned scary – people get fired, people get ostracized, people get killed.

Robin

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2. From Tom Hanks, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Tom is a PCUSA pastor, Scripture scholar, President of OTHER SHEEP, an ecumenical Christian ministry to sexual minorities.

Dear Ed, If it is thus with the Lutherans, you can imagine what is is amongst Presbyterians. You might find

additional consolation (and significant perspectives) from Elsa Tamez' Orbis book on justification as inclusion of the excluded (my former student, now head of the Univeridad Biblica of Costa Rica, and an Other Sheep board member). My Princeton review called it the most significant book on justification since the Reformation. Basically, of course, she's trying to show why/how justification by faith in Paul was Good News to the Poor, which may be a more significant question than the kind traditionally asked in the survey.

Abrazos, Tom

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3. From Wayne Holst, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Wayne is a Lutheran pastor, Prof at the Univ. of Calgary in missiology and related subjects.

Ed: Thanks for sharing what I would suggest is not so much a bombshell as a form of 'get real'. Americans and Canadians are more influenced by what is going on out there in the general culture than what they are hearing from the pulpit or academic lectern. I believe that Lutherans may have been protected longer from the influence of mainstream culture because there were certain ethnic and traditional forces at work.

Now, much of that has broken down. I see the same forces at work in Catholicism, and other 'minority' elements in the non-AngloSaxon dominated elements of CanAm societies today.

As much as I would like to think that my Lutheran heritage and traditions have much to offer our respective cultures in Canada and the United States, I sense we must

face the reality that general social forces will be more influential than those which are provided by the churches themselves.

Wayne

4. From Cynthia Fazzini, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Cynthia is an ELCA pastor.

Thanks for this, Ed. I am always happy to receive ThTh. I went right to the Luth. Broth. website and copied out the whole thing. I had never heard of this survey and wonder why it was not distributed by LB to all pastors! I'd like your permission to distribute your summary to a group of senior students at the [Lutheran] Philadelphia seminary, whom I lead each Monday in a section of the required senior class "Pastor as Theologian." We talk about internship experiences, and I try (VERY HARD!!) to get them out of psychobabble and into talking theologically. Your summary would be a good way to illustrate to them just what the people in the pews believe!

Cynthia

5. From Michael Borgas, Tanunda, South Australia. Michael teaches both religion and physics (I think that's his combo. Maybe it's math—or "maths" as they say in the Commonwealth.) at Faith Lutheran High School near Adelaide.

I greatly appreciate your ThTh listings. It always challenges me to think and think deeply. I'm really struggling here with students that I teach. It is just a

theoretical gospel, even if they hear it. It is a malignant church. A church too busy to grow deep. A church too busy to grow at all. . . . Lutherans would be shocked by Luther. Christians would be infuriated by Jesus. They would silence Luther and kill Jesus all over again. But they so rarely hear Luther or Jesus. We are all so busy with the crazy circles that we rush around in. Have you seen the Truman show? A brilliant film. We too must break out of our phony worlds and learn the hard truth.

Michael

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6. And finally this teasing riddle from John Roxborough in Auckland, New Zealand. John is a Missions Prof at Bible College of New Zealand. A super-cyber-whiz, he manages the website for IAMS, the International Association for Mission Studies.

Dear Ed. In the light of your summary of the state of Lutheran theology – and probably everybody else's as well – I think you need to do something about the name of your list server. SABBATHEOLOGY@SOMETHING.COM Has the "L" got anything to do with "legal" or does the softness apply more to its homophone?

John