

Student Achievement in Lutheran Confessional Theology

Colleagues, Here's some theology coming from the term papers and final exams in that Augsburg-Aha! course taught by Ron Neustadt and ES in Springfield IL this past quarter.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

In her essay on the Triune God a student asked: "How would I respond to someone who told me that she didn't believe that God exists?" Her response was: "I would give them a Bible. Tell them to read it and learn that God does exist." Prompted ES to suggest this alternative line of response to the doubter:

- 1. Let's stop for a moment talking about "IF" God exists.*
- 2. Let's just talk personal life stuff for starters.*
- 3. What is it that you fear the most, love the most, trust the most? Fear, love, trust are verbs of the heart.*
- 4. The Bible says: Whatever it is that you fear, love, trust, THAT is the God you already are connected too—by your own choice.*
- 5. Luther once said: Whatever your heart is hanging onto, THAT is the God that is real for you. Even if you argue—in your head— that "God doesn't exist."*
- 6. So everybody has some god, but different folks have different gods, different things, different "powers," that they hang their hearts on. Sometimes in terror and fear (I'm gonna lose my job!—and I'm hanging my heart on keeping my job!). Sometimes in love and trust. (I just love my retirement account—my good looks, my*

achievements, my moxie, whatever, for the security it gives me. I trust it with my whole heart.)

7. God-talk that is important is not about something in your head (does God exist or not?), it's about stuff going on in your heart: What are you hanging onto for dear life? Stuff you fear or love or trust or sometimes all three together on the same stuff..
8. Then let's ask: "How's your god doing these days? Is your god taking care of you—giving you all the stuff you really need to live in peace and joy? Also finally to cope with your own death?"
9. Well, if your god isn't doing a perfect job for you, then you ought to think about "switching" gods, right?
10. Switch to some God who can supply all the stuff. Especially the big stuff about coping with your failures, your troubles, your guilt, your messing-up—or nowadays the "mess" of the world you and I live in—finally, your death.
11. I've got a God to recommend for that. Name is Jesus. He OFFERS a zinger of a PROMISE for all that stuff mentioned in #9.
12. If you've got time, I'll tell you more

Theology of the Lutheran Confessions Final Exam

Marilyn Dudley

I think my confessions grade should be A.

Section A:

Essay 1

The Church and Ministry: Articles 5, 7, 8, 14, 15

A. Article 5 says that for us to obtain faith, God

instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these means, He gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession defines the church as the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel. The unity of the church comes from trust in Christ. It is not necessary for true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. And Article 8 adds that because in this life many hypocrites and evil people are mixed in with them, a person may use the sacraments even when they are administered by evil people. Article 14 teaches that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call. Article 15 teaches that keeping church regulations made by human beings are ok if they may be kept without sin and serve to maintain peace and good order in the church. Further these things must not burden consciences, serve to appease God or to earn grace or make satisfaction for sin. These things are good for nothing and contrary to the gospel.

- B. The way that these articles about the church and ministry are connected to the Hub is that they are all grounded in justification by faith alone in Christ. By God's grace, we are saved NOT through our own merit, but through Christ's merit, when we so believe. We obtain faith when we hear the Gospel through preaching, the sacraments or absolution. The rim is the distinction between law and gospel. So the test here will be are they "ya gottas," law or "ya gettas," gospel. It is not "if I do this, then God will do that for me." It's I do this because God loved me first and gave his son Jesus Christ to die for

my sins. Any human regulations or ceremonies must be evaluated on the basis of whether they try to "over-ride" or negate the free gift of salvation through faith alone.

C. I think there is a lot of false teaching on this spoke. An example is churches that teach that works are required for salvation. Probably one of the popular proponents of this teachings is Rick Warren, "40 Days of Purpose," where he says that salvation depends on the right choices and decisions that I make and how I follow through. It is definitely Law: "ya gottas." In response to that teaching, I would say that salvation is a free gift from God. My salvation was paid for by Christ's death-the "sweet swap" according to Martin Luther. I need only believe it to get it. There is nothing I can "do" (works) to earn my salvation. John 3:16: For God so loved the World, that He gave His only Son so that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. No mention of works here!

Section B: Essay 2

Baptism: Articles 9, 11, 12

A. Article 9 states that Baptism is necessary for salvation, that the Grace of God is offered through it, and that children (including babies) should be baptized. The Apology says that God gives the Holy Spirit to those so baptized. Luther argues that baptizing babies must be ok with God because it has existed for over 1500 years without any obvious correction by God. If babies had not been baptized, then the Holy Spirit would have been given to no one and no one would be saved and there would have been no church. Articles 11 and 12 concern confession and repentance. Enumerating all misdeeds and sins is not necessary or even possible. The apology maintains that we believe the absolution and regard as certain that the

forgiveness of sins is given to us freely on account of Christ and that we should maintain that we are truly reconciled to God by this faith. In Article 12, it is taught that those who have sinned after baptism obtain forgiveness of sins whenever they come to repentance and that absolution should not be denied them by the church. Such faith comforts the heart and puts it at peace. Good works, the fruit of repentance, should follow.

- B. Again this connects to the hub of the Good News: Justification by Faith in Christ, Faith Alone. Baptism (water and word) delivers the Holy Spirit which allows us to believe and thereby be saved. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. Baptism is one of the pipelines from God to trusting people. Confession is a return to Baptism: to the promise, a way to remember baptism. The rim, the distinction between law and gospel comes into play so that if there are any “ya gotta’s”, (law) then Christ is not in the picture. So for example if it is taught that you must believe before being baptized, that becomes a “do this so God will do that,” that is a “ya gotta.” Baptism is part of the free gift of God (Gospel). The right use of Baptism is through remembering our Baptism by daily repentance and starting anew each day—being born anew each day.
- C. An example of false teaching on this article are those churches that teach that baptism is valid only if it’s preceded by a personal confession of faith and thus babies shouldn’t be baptized. I would respond and say that Grace (salvation) is a free gift of God and is to be offered to all-men, women, children, and infants. The Bible instructs us to baptize all nations—not just adults. Children are received into the grace of God when they are offered to God through baptism. Their faith will grow because they have received the Holy Spirit and have

become children of God. Baptism is God's claiming us as his own children.

Essay 2 B: The pipeline.

The term ministry is like a pipeline. The pipeline image first shows that the promise comes from God and that faith comes from hearing the promise and believing it-not through any good works or any work on our own, but through faith. The pipeline image is like a water line bringing water to your house from the city water plant, only in this case it is the pipeline from God which is the delivery system. Or it might be called the media (middle agencies) which bring the promise from the time when Jesus lived, died and rose again, into the future (now) to us who didn't live in Jesus' time. These media consist of the Gospel proclaimed and the sacraments (baptism, holy communion, and absolution of sins). When the "valves on the pipeline and the faucet are turned on," the promise flows to the receivers. The church is the assembly of believers where the Word (Gospel) is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel. The church is an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons. The Gospel is the good news being transferred or delivered via the pipeline. Public preaching, Baptism, Holy Communion, and Absolution are part of the pipeline-the means of grace. The Holy Spirit uses these media to connect people to Christ's promise. The Holy Spirit works through these media to transfer the promise of Christ ("goodies" of Christ's world/work) to people. Christ-connected people talking, praying, consoling, caring are ways to take care of or to open the pipeline. We are all (baptized people) called to be part of caring for the pipeline to deliver faith and fight sin.

The Augsburg Confession also says that even when the ungodly do as Christ commands-proclaiming the Good news and administering the sacraments "gospelly" – these actions work to bring people

to faith and keep them Christ-connected. The pipeline functions even when the “valve-openers” are not Gospel-trusters.

Tom Galyen Essay #1

Article XVIII Free Will

A. What do the Augsburg Confession and the Apology say about Free Will? The Augsburg Confession concerning Free Will states that we have free will but it is limited. This God-given free will allows us to live a normal, honorable or “natural” life. This free will allows us to carry out our duties to our families, our jobs, our communities, even to our country. This might be compared to having the ability to carry out the left hand duties that every human being on earth is charged with by God, which is working for the care of all that God has created. We have an internal wiring, of sorts, to know right from wrong and a built in desire to do the right thing in most circumstances, as long as the right thing does not interfere with our desire to look out for number one. To show that they were teaching nothing new the reformers quoted St. Augustine’s Hypognosticon: “We confess that there is a free will in all human beings. For all have a natural, innate mind and reason ... they do have the freedom to choose good or evil only in the external works of this life.” However, we also have the free will to do evil, such as worship false idols, commit murder, etc. The Confession states that by good they meant only that which is natural and all persons whether or not they are Christians can do it. They did point out that this ability does not exist or endure without God for everything is from and through him. However a human being can by exercising this same free will do evil such as

idol worship, murder and the like.

The reformers rejected the teachings of those who said that we can keep the commandments of God without God's grace and the Holy Spirit, or that we are able to truly fear, love, and believe in God solely on our own power. In rejecting this teaching the reformers emphasized their position that our free will is limited.

In the Apology to the Confutation, the reformers pointed out that although their opponents received and agreed with their confession that they had gone on to describe a "middle way" siding neither with the Pelagians, nor with the Manichaeans. The first they said ascribed too much free will and the latter took away all liberty. The reformers then pointed out that there was very little difference between their opponents' view and the Pelagians, because both claimed that people could keep the commandments of God apart from the Holy Spirit.

The reformers then went on to illuminate and strengthen their confession by stating that human will does have freedom as far as reason can comprehend by itself, and that this freedom allows us to perform acts of civil righteousness. It allows us to talk about God, and even to an extent obey the laws of the second tablet of the Ten Commandments. This would include honoring our parents and rulers, not committing adultery, robbery, or murder. We have a basic ability to reason right from wrong and a desire to do what is right. However, the power of concupiscence is so powerful that people will normally obey their evil desires rather than sound judgment. Boy, could I write volumes on that subject. In addition to this desire to look out for ourselves before others, is the fact that as Paul wrote in his letter to the

Ephesians (Ephesians 2:2) that we follow “the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” That for these reasons even civil righteousness is rare.

The Apology teaches that although we do have free will and the power to perform external works of the law we do not have free will to do those things which require spiritual help, such as fear God, have true faith in God, and have the true conviction that God cares for us, hears our prayers and petitions, and forgives us our sins. These are works of the first tablet of the commandments and the heart cannot produce results without the Holy Spirit. We can see this if we look at what we believe in our hearts about the will of God. That is do we really believe that God cares for us and hears our prayers and forgives us. The reformers teach that it is difficult for the saints to have such faith, and it is impossible for the ungodly. However this belief can come into existence in terrified hearts when we hear the gospel and receive consolation.

All people ought to know that God requires civil righteousness (left hand works) and to some extent we are able to achieve it. However, to fully achieve civil righteousness and spiritual righteousness (enabling us to carry out our right hand duties) we must have the Holy Spirit within us, and the Holy Spirit is given to us free.

B. What is the connection between this article of faith and the Hub of the Wheel? We created humans have two duties assigned to us from God. They can be called the left hand and right hand duties. The left hand duties are those concerned with the care of all that God has created,

especially that within our individual spheres of influence. I, as a human being have the assignment of caring for my family, and all that which is within the sphere of my daily world. This care for God's creation comes in the form of obeying the second tablet of the Ten Commandments, to honor my mother and father, to abstain from adultery, and all forms of criminal behavior, etc. In this I have free will to do good or evil. I may want to do good for various even altruistic reasons and to an extent can carry out my duties. However, I am unable to perform this assignment to the perfect degree demanded by God. As an example, I am unable to perfectly keep even the commandment against murder, for although I have never killed anyone, Jesus states "But anyone who says, 'you fool' will be in danger of the fire of hell," and I can't drive anywhere without thinking this about a number of drivers.

Now if we cannot carry out our left hand assignments as God wills, we certainly cannot carry out our right hand assignment which is the redemption of all that God has created. In this we have no free will at all because it requires the power of the Holy Spirit in us, and he takes up residence only in those who are justified and made right with God. The "Good News" of the Gospel is that we are justified or made right with God by faith and by faith alone.

Now the law demands perfect obedience to the law of God which would mean perfect carrying out of both the civil and spiritual assignments from God; tasks which are impossible to carry out in our own power or by our free will. However, when we are justified and made right with God by our faith in Jesus, then the Holy Spirit enables us to carry out these assignments, and we now have the

knowledge that even when we now fail in our attempts that we have forgiveness and we can pick our selves up and try again.

C. An example of false teaching on Free Will and how I would respond to it. A good example I think is one which I presently see on the TBN network. I have watched Pastor Ron Parsely on his program preach to his audience that in this year of 2008, that if you demonstrate to God your faith by "planting a seed of 2008 dollars" then God will then take control of your circumstances and lead you out of poverty to wealth. If it is your will to better yourself then the way to do it is to "invest" your money in God and he will open the windows of heaven and pour out your blessing. This is because God wants to bless us, but *REQUIRES* us to prove our faith in him by planting a seed, and when the seed is planted, then God will be obligated to carry out his part of the "bargain" and grant you what you want. I see this as a plain "works" program in that when I do this then God must do that. However where are Christ and the Holy Spirit? Pastor Ron does say that Christ and the Holy Spirit are calling the people to send in their seed, and that when you do then you will be blessed, but that is as far as any mention of Jesus or the Holy Spirit goes.

My response to this is that if we live in faith and with the power of the Holy Spirit we believe that God truly loves us and cares for us, then he will take care of us whether we send 2,008 dollars to a pastor or not. That God will take care of our needs no matter what our station in life is, and the Holy Spirit will enable us to experience what Paul described when he wrote to the Philippians, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of

being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:12-13) This knowledge was a gift of the Holy Spirit to him and also to all who truly trust in God. This is where the hub "The good news" of our acceptance by God through faith enables us to face difficulties in our lives, and then we will be able to carry out both our right and left hand duties.

Essay #2

Article XVII The Return of Christ to Judgment

A. What do the Augsburg Confession and the Apology say about The Return of Christ? The teaching in this article is short and was uncontested by the opponents of the Confession. The reformers taught that Jesus will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise the dead, to give eternal life and joy to those who believe and are the elect, but to condemn those who do not believe and the devils to hell and eternal punishment.

They rejected the teachings of the Anabaptists that unbelievers and devils will not suffer eternal torture and torment.

They also rejected the teachings of some Jewish teaching of their day that before the resurrection of the dead, that saints and righteous people will possess a secular kingdom and annihilate all the ungodly.

In the Apology the reformers again state their confession that Christ will appear at the end of the world and will raise up all the dead giving eternal life and joy to the godly, but condemning the ungodly to endless torment with

the devil.

B. What is the connection between this article of faith and the Hub of the Wheel? I believe that this is one of the Articles that really go to the core of the hub. It is a statement that brings the utmost horror to the heart of the unbeliever when they think of the consequences of their life choice. We all, at one time or another, think about what will happen at the end of time. On television we have the media telling us how close we are to the end. One recent program on the History Channel even pointed out that some of the more well known prophecies of various religions predict the end of the world by the year 2012. The world could be blown up by just about anyone at anytime. If that doesn't happen then we will either drown when global warming melts the ice caps, or starve when global warming reduces the harvests of food to a level that cannot sustain life. Civilization as we know it will end when the oil runs out and we kill each other to obtain this vital commodity. According to some scientists super germs and bacteria are growing at an exponential rate and we will soon have no known cure for the super diseases that they may bring.

We are told that we are evil and deserving of God's judgment. We have displeased God because we have not helped his people Israel enough or because we have helped them too much. We are told that we are evil because we have raped and destroyed God's creation and we therefore have no hope.

Above all of these voices of gloom and doom we hear the message of the gospel. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. This simple refrain resounds against the harsh pharisaical shouts of

the “end of time” law followers. God loved all of his creation two thousand years ago when he sent his Son into the world to save it, and there is no Biblical proof that his love has in any way diminished since then. Jesus will return at a time that will be determined by God and not at any time calculated by an earthly “End Time Prophet”.

The bad news for many is the fact that there will be a day of judgment. The reformers and their opponents agree on that, and even the “End Time Prophets” agree on that. There is no word in the Bible or the Augsburg Confession that in any way refutes this claim. However, the good news is that no-one really needs to fear this if they will accept the free gift of reconciliation granted by God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Those who teach that God is too much of a loving God to actually condemn anyone to hell are wrong. God is truth and therefore must be true to his word. If he were not then Jesus died for nothing, and God’s greatest act of love and grace was empty. Jesus himself promised that those who believe will be saved and those who do not are already condemned.

C. An example of false teaching on The Return of Christ and how I would respond to it. So now we come to the Hal Lindsey’s, the John Hagee’s, the Tim Lahaye’s and the Jerry Jenkins’s of our modern world. The Pharisees of Jesus day would be very comfortable with their teachings. Right makes might and only through mighty violent acts can those “left behind” be able to work out their salvation by destroying the forces of the Antichrist. The blood in the legends of Gilgamesh, or Beowulf did not run as deep, and all for the glory of God, so that the left behind Tribulation Force may prove their faithfulness to God by exterminating his enemies. As if, of course, God

is not able to destroy anything he wishes.

According to Barbara Rossing, the words that these messengers of doom like most are of course the rather mysterious words of Daniel and Revelation. But these words were written to actually give consolation to people who were going through actual tribulation in their day. And how did those people react to the words of these books? They mainly responded, according to Rossing, by "patient endurance" or resistance, not armed resistance as in the Left Behind books, but by trusting in the good news of the gospel and living as best they could in the trust they had in the promises of Jesus.

I think the best response to the Left Behind teaching is a phrase that Barbara Rossing attributes to Martin Luther. "If I knew the world were going to end tomorrow I would plant a tree." I think this best shows the faith that we should have in the promises of love and grace found in the gospel. The idea of planting a tree shows not just passive endurance of just going with the flow because I'm doomed anyway type of thinking, but rather a positive, forward looking trust, that when Christ does return we will be found quietly performing our right hand assignment from God to allow the Holy Spirit to work through us for the redemption of all of his creation.

Section B

Question C: How has my own working theology changed during this course in the Lutheran Confessions?

My knowledge of the Lutheran Church has of course grown fantastically. As I said in class I was baptized at St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Hoboken, New Jersey, but when my family moved to Illinois there were no Lutheran

Churches near where we lived, so we went to the "family" church. If I now had to identify the theology of this church I would have to say it has Anabaptist roots. For this reason I have always had problems being torn between these two opposed theologies. I went to a Jack Van Impe with friends from that area and heard, of course, teaching which reinforced the Anabaptist view. Still there has always somehow been a quiet voice keeping me from totally accepting those teachings. I became a member of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Urbana about 25 or so years ago, and although I took the new member class and many other classes by very good teachers, and even have taught many classes myself I have always been a little unsure of the basis of the teachings I am following. I have to admit that I never had real firm foundation for what I was teaching and as long as it was safely straight from the Bible and had a lot of history wrapped around it, I could do it quite well, while having some reservations. I do not know how many times I have prayed that God would send some great miracle to me so all doubt is removed. My name is Thomas and could live up to the nickname "the doubter," and since I'm also a twin, you can see how I do identify with him.

After taking this course, and studying not only the Augsburg Confession, but the Confutation, and the Apology, as well as doing the reading for my paper on baptism, I have put most if not all those doubts to rest. One question I asked myself early on in this course was this, "If I was, at some time, required to baptize an infant could I in faith do it?" And until I wrote the essay that I did I could not truthfully answer that question. I can say now, however, that yes I could do that with no reservation at all, and have no doubt about

my own.

I see results of this course in the preparation and presentation of the material for the "Lectionary Series" class that I teach. I try as much as possible to bring the people in the class to see the law and the gospel in each of the lessons we study.

In my years I have been to a church where after an immersion baptism one person in the back claimed that the baptized was not really baptized because her arm did not go under the water. At another they had men standing at the door to prevent women from entering who were not dressed appropriately according to their "rules". I have seen good and not so good in many churches even the Lutheran Church. I could not understand why this is. This course while it concentrated on the Confessions of our Church also gave me insight into where the other branches of Protestantism came from. I understand better their actions and I have a better understanding of where we as Lutherans may be headed. Last Sunday our pastor led us in looking at the draft paper on sexuality that just came out. As I listened to how they are working on it I saw in the back of my mind Melanchthon and the Reformers working on the confessions in Augsburg in 1530.

If a Lutheran may confess to a little pride, I am proud to confess that I am a Lutheran.