

Thank You Notes After Christmas

Colleagues,

Herewith my Thank You notes—really an open letter—to all the folks who blessed me with an essay in that Birthday Festschrift last month. Responding to each contributor in those 229 pages I did exceed my own length-limit for a regular ThTh post. But I trust you can adjust. FYI, there still are Festschrift copies available at the Crossings office. I did not buy out the entire press run to send as Christmas presents. See the Crossings website for sample pages and how to get one: <www.crossings.org>Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Festschrift Benefactors, all Dear, Two days after Christmas and high time to write those thank yous for the presents, those hand/head-crafted gifts you sent my way on November 6. Yes, I am about a month overdue from the time I did indeed read through the whole volume.

Part of it is being tongue-tied. What to say for this bundle of benefactions? Part of it is the slow-down that's coming with those three-and-one-half score years. Even if Thursday Theology postings still making their weekly appearance—pretty soon, d.v., 400—might suggest the contrary. And I won't mention sloth and procrastination.

I recite the long list of folks, real theologians, who didn't get Festschrifts as far as I know, and that pushes the

question: Why me? What I come up with is that you, you all, are the answer. I've been blessed—mirabile dictu—with different students and colleagues than those other folks have had. If not, then their students/colleagues would have done likewise for them. But they didn't and you did. Y'all are something else. And that goes doubly for the really crazy ones, you editors, Steve, Sherm and Robin, who engineered it all, who oozed the buckets of sweat equity to put this marvel into my hands.

I imagine, though I'm not sure, that in the German tradition whence *Festschriften* come, the honored one writes a letter—(hand-writes, I betcha, in the old days) a separate letter to each author. I may well be considerably “Kraut-ish,” but that Teutonic I am not. Thus what I say to one below, I say to all. And this I say to all: I'm smitten, thrilled, carried away (here I will jump into German) “hingerissen” by your *Festschrift* gift to me. With this (no surprise) homiletic add-on, that you gift-givers are the loftiest gifts of all.

1. Jerome E. Burce

GOSPEL BLAZES IN THE DARK What a title! Both for the book and for your poem, Jerry. What was its provenance, I wonder. All the more so in this octave when St. John's prolog, the Gospel for 12/25, takes light/darkness as major metaphors for his cosmic rendition of “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” I was guest preacher at our Bethel congregation on Sunday and didn't come close to ringing the changes on that as powerfully as you did, Jerry. And nowhere near as poetically or rhetorically. Here is a case where the student—pace, Jesus—is clearly beyond the teacher. Thanks be to God.

2. David Gooding

You were unknown to me before November 6. I have already asked Jerry to pass on to you my “todah.” Jerry encouraged

me to use that Hebrew word (much more multi-faceted than its regular English rendering "give thanks"). Now I know why. You double as worship-music-man for a Hebrew congregation as well as at Jerry's Messiah Lutheran Church in Greater Cleveland, Ohio. Up till now my miniscule knowledge of the Cleveland music scene was the name George Szell and more recently Dietrich Bonhoeffer's nephew, Christoph von Dohnanyi, son of Dietrich's sister Christine and director of the Cleveland Symphony. Now I not only know better, but I've been a direct beneficiary of a great Gooding gift. That gift repeats every time that we sing the hymn again (skipping Jerry's 2a verse about "fiery Ed," lest my hybris go hyper). The melody lingers on. Thanks be to God. Todah.

3. Ron O'Grady

Your chapter was a surprise. Not its substance, but that "they" found you straight through the middle of our planet in New Zealand. But cyberspace is now the "noe-sphere" that Teilhard dreamed of (wasn't that his term?), and I shouldn't be surprised. I should ask the library experts for verification, but I'm guessing that no *Festschrift*—surely not in the tradition of published theology—ever appeared with four full-color full-page prints of contemporary Christian art. Best of all is your walking us through our own American culture and history—churchly and otherwise—put before our eyes by these four artists. Doubtless folks from afar see us more clearly than we even can see ourselves. Marie joins me in the doxology for that serendipity when you and Alison first crossed our path—and the several Crossings thereafter at our house, your house and even in Korea in 1992. Thanks be to God.

4. Albert E. Jabs

Al, your piece opens the *Festschrift's* Part II. Gospel

Blazes in Life's Journey. You are even more hooked on German terms than I am, as you trace the strange and wonderful lines of your own life journey. Indeed, in many places it has paralleled and intersected with mine. For example, that "intersection" in Japan where you found Ron O'Grady's art book (now you know him too, right next to you in the Festschrift) with Marie's and Ed's prose in it. The hype you send in my direction is patently hyperbole (literally: something thrown way too high). Even though what goes up must come down, I binged on it as I read it. For your manifold ministries, not least of which to the Crossings Community, Thanks be to God.

5. Robert C. Schultz

Bob, you know the Festschrift tradition inside-out from its German roots, so no wonder that your essay has all those footnotes—90 of them—underpinning your monograph. But the topic calls for them, a chronicle of our time together, almost a half century ago, in our first "paid jobs" as theology profs at Valparaiso University. That itself wouldn't call for footnotes. But your proposal to track the work we did in hammering out "The Distinction between Law and Gospel as a Hermeneutical Principle: Valparaiso University 1958-1960" during those days, that cannot be done without documents. You patently kept them all; I didn't, even though we were co-conspirators on this assignment and worked desk-to-desk in the same office. So you have the file folders. You tell us what's in them. Plus you interpret it in the environment of the Missouri Synod of that day, the bane and blessing of our younger years. That LCMS doctoral student (name I forget) whose recent dissertation weighed "Valparaiso theology" and found it wanting, needs your documentary to get his facts straight, even if it might not make straight the path of his own theology. What makes your essay relevant

for Crossings folks, as you and I know, but they may not, is that those two years at Valpo, with department chair Bob Bertram in the troika, were the opening chapter of the history of Crossings. And, as I think I could document, this is also an early chapter in the history of Seminex. Here too you, like Al Jabs, hyperventilate my role at that time. But maybe I'm just more forgetful. Perhaps it is more than my file folders that are empty. But if I'm not that amnesiac, methinks mi-office-mate professeth too much. Even so, thanks be to God for those good old days—and the decades we've been hustling this hermeneutic since then.

6. Joest J. Mnemba

Joest, after Ron's gift from New Zealand, comes one even more exotic from you in Malawi, East Africa. We get no colored pictures in your "Images of Christ in Africa," but the word-images are equally vivid, even visual. You show us the "made-in-Malawi" matrix for several images of Christ—as ancestor, as mediator/intercessor, as first-born, as medicine man, as lamb that was slain. This last one brings to my mind another African theologian, from Botswana, I think, Gabriel M. Setiloane, and his poem from 1973 "I Am An African." In his final stanzas he tells us:

And yet for us it is when He is on the cross,
This Jesus of Nazareth, with holed hands
and open side, like a beast at a sacrifice:
When He is stripped naked like us,
Browned and sweating water and blood in the heat of the
sun,
Yet silent,
That we cannot resist Him. How like us He is, this Jesus
of Nazareth,
Beaten, tortured, imprisoned, spat upon, truncheoned.

Denied by His own, and chased like a thief in the night.

*Despised, and rejected like a dog that has fleas,
for NO REASON*

OR . . . Was there a reason?

There was indeed . . .

*As in that sheep or goat we offer in sacrifice,
Quiet and uncomplaining.*

*Its blood falling to the ground to cleanse it, as us:
And making peace between us and our fathers long passed away.*

He is that LAMB!

*His blood cleanses,
not only us,*

*not only the clan,
not only the tribe,*

But all, all MANKIND:

*Black and White and Brown and Red,
All Mankind!*

*H0! . . . Jesus, Lord, Son of Man and Son of God,
Make peace with your blood and sweat and suffering,
With God, UVELINGQAKI, UNKULUNKULU,*

*For the sins of Mankind, our fathers and us,
That standing in the same Sonship with all mankind and you,*

*Together with you, we can pray to Him above:
FATHER FORGIVE.*

*Marie and I still have vivid images of our time with you,
hob-nobbing around with your fellow-priests and parishioners (even the bishop!) as you gave us the royal tour those five days in Malawi in 2000. The memories*

become visual too at year's end. For right now we have the Malawi Christmas creche out on the table with those stunning hand-carved ebony figures, your kinfolk, verifying what Setiloane says and those images in your essay present. For all this, thanks be to God.

7. Jerome E Burce

In addition to your blazing poetry at the front of the Festschrift comes now Jerry's jolly juggling with the term "justify." Which you run through the rhetoric of the computer (where I am engaged this very moment) to make perfectly clear in your own "nickel words" God's alternate proposal for "justifying" the lines of our life stories. Instead of picking a Procrustean paradigm—chopping off our excesses, stretching us ad infinitum to meet shortcomings, which would indeed obliterate our stories altogether—God opts, as you say, "to clean up our lines with a new program, the Word made flesh...the Word-Processor of word processors: XP [Chi-Rho]-Word," with the "Control-JC" button always at the ready. Reminding your conversation partner, Joe, what his secretary does to clean up his scissors-and-pasted reports and make them letter perfect, you tell us "In the same way when God, using XP-Word, wants to clean up the Great page of humanity, your line and mine included, he justifies the ungodly. Here's how. He highlights the text and hits Control-JC. Bingo. There it is, all beautiful, just the way God wanted it." Perhaps "nickel words" is no longer everyday argot, but your vocabulary of microchip-chatter says it like it is in lingo that is perfectly clear to this Illinois farm boy. For that and for a quarter-century of other goodies from JB about JC to me, Thanks be to God.

8. Gary M. Simpson

When you place me alongside Dietrich Bonhoeffer with a view to show parallels instead of dissonance between us, I am flabbergasted. Not that I haven't learned—some of it through guys like you—that Bonhoeffer is the sort of Lutheran I'd like to be too. But I've never had the chutzpah, even the idea, to lay some of his bons mots alongside my own and see if they converge. Especially in the Christmas octave commemorating St. Stephen and Holy Innocents, martyrs for the faith, Bonhoeffer included, it just don't seem kosher to place them right alongside those of us who haven't laid down our lives for the Christ. When you reference "Schroeder's critique of Barth," my first thought is: What did I really say about Barth back there in my dissertation? When you then follow that up, saying that Bonhoeffer's Confession of Christ "intensifies Schroeder's critique," I sit up and listen. First response: "Who, me?" But if you say so, you, the first Seminex doctorate in systematic theology, then I ought to say Alfred Neumann's line: "What, me worry?" You have scoured my stuff, stuff that I'd almost forgotten (Areopagus, Setlioane, stuff in both the old and the new CTM), and I must admit that the way you put it together makes a compelling case. So I won't "argue" with you. [Now that's a switch!] Instead I'll thank you for this focused attention, serious (re-)searching, and happy conclusion. So once more, Thanks be to God. [P.S. the German citation in fn. 26 seems mixed up. Is it my problem? Yours? Luther's own? Or no snafu at all?]

9. Mervyn Wagner

Merv, your contribution, also a complete surprise, is a happy voice to hear—that of a third gift-giver (after Joest and Ron) from "downunder" in the southern hemisphere. You wrestle a tough topic, a classic case-study for Lutheran theology. How to be a community of

God's left-hand operation, a school with its educational calling, AND the holy Christian community (call it "church") both the product and the on-going agent of God's unique right-hand Christic initiative—and to do so "simul," all at the same time. Your ping-pong playing with the words "form" and "inform" is fascinating. You sift the rhetoric of "Gospel principles," often claimed for institutions that Christians build and operate, and show that even benign as they may be, principles are finally rules and regulations. Which THE gospel is not. Unless you specify the strange way God's "Gospel" rules. Namely by managing sinners with mercy, a.k.a. God's regime in Christ, always a give-away and never a you-gotta. In school terms: always a free lunch, never an assignment. So how can you run a school that way? You answer that under the rubric (glombed from Luther's catechisms) of baptismal priesthood. And that you divvy up three-fold: Christian vocation, speaking on behalf of others and finally speaking on behalf of God. Do you have any reports of schools who wrote such rubrics into their own mission statements? What happened? In the early days of Seminex we attempted to do something similar. Since we were starting a new school from scratch, we had new possibilities. Much of your essay recalls our attempts of 30-plus years ago. We didn't succeed to get everybody on board for our consciously-crafted left-hand/right-hand paradigm for "internal governance," as we called it, so it frequently limped. Where it did take effect, it was palpably different from the "benign monarchy" we'd all known from the past. One such difference was the shared responsibility across the board within the entire community. Bob Bertram discovered an ancient axiom from the Dominicans in the Middle Ages that we made our own: "The decision-makers shall be the consequence-takers, and

the consequence-takers shall be the decision-makers."

Your proposal re-issues the call to use our Lutheran heritage at a core crossing point of the Gospel and our world. Thanks be to God.

10. Timothy J. Hoyer

You credit me with being a "nickel-words-smith." I thought I mostly told you seminarians that YOU should use nickel words in pastoring people. Whereas I, trying to move beyond my rural heritage, sought to learn some big words to demonstrate that I really belonged in the professors' club. So I'd inflict the dollar-sized words on you in the classroom—if for no other reason than to keep my job. This seemed to be required for the theological stuff that I submitted for publication. We used to joke in faculty meetings that the rule was "Publish or parish." Yes, that's an "a" not and "e" in the last word. But if you say that I never did escape the nickel words (and thus probably never did qualify for my big-words union card), and I did still keep my job, and you think that's a good thing, well, I won't quibble. Instead for you and your superb nickel-word theologizing, Thanks be to God.

11. Marcus C. Lohrmann

With what finesse you use the old "double dipstick" for asking and answering the question: Is the Church Dying? For as you say, there are better and worse ways for both asking and answering that. Your way is the better one. It's normed by that "double dipstick" we both learned years ago: 1) the uncluttered Gospel that necessitates Christ and 2) thus offers genuine "comfort and joy" to folks besieged by bad news, sometimes wall-to-wall bad news. I know you didn't do it just for me—using all those

core confessional building blocks in this essay. I know that this prose is indeed the life-language of your episcopal praxis. For which I rejoice. What a cheering birthday present. Of course, as I read your essay, I remembered when the two of us as a team did similar stuff in Hong Kong in 1988, followed by that wild visit to the Phillippines. We called it *Crossings* then, and your *Festschrift* contribution shows that you're doing it still. All three steps: *TRACKING* the realities of those 189 congregations in NW Ohio whom you serve as synod. Getting your *FOUNDINGS* in the Christ-necessitating Gospel, and then *CROSSING* the two in the case study you give us from your daily work as synod bishop with those congregations. Your concluding sentences answer the opening question with a yes and no. "We have sought to show that the church is always in need of reclaiming the gospel and that when it fails to do so, in specific places and times, its dying can be a reflection of its unbelief and the judgment of God. We have indicated the truth that the church that is reliant upon the Lord is freed to give itself in service (i.e., dying) in the fashion of him who gave himself for the church." So there is dying and then there is dying. With your case study you gave us "one specific context" where you are the called leader "where dying is sometimes a result of unfaithfulness... and at other times a sign of the most vigorous faith in the most impossible of circumstances." Though I've said it to others above, I mean it for you too: Thanks be to God.

12. Steven E. Albertin

Steve, your namesake, editor Steve Kuhl, in introducing you to the *Festschrift* readership, credits you with saying this: "few have law-gospel lenses as finely ground as Ed [does]." Seems to me your lenses are in the same

category. The three “homiletical binds” you show us for law/gospel preaching testify to your own lenses. So that triggers this shop-talk among team-mates. It starts with my wondering about the expression “preaching God’s law.” It’s part of our standard vocabulary. Yet I wonder, is it really kosher? Do you know any place in the New Testament (or the Old) where that verb has that noun as its direct object? Isn’t the verb for preaching/proclaiming always linked to the Good News? And if that is so, what are we doing with “preaching both law and gospel” when the founding texts preach only one? Is preaching a verb reserved ONLY for the Good News? Isn’t it true that there really is no “neutral” verb for preaching in NT Greek at all, a verb that could go either way –with law or with gospel? The two main verbs I’m thinking of, keryssein and euaggelizein, have the object already tucked inside the verb: hustle THE message, gospelize (be a good-news-pusher). Here’s a hunch I have, specked out in Crossings medical metaphors of diagnosis and prognosis. To wit, the diagnostic task does not “preach” the patient into her sickness saying “You think you are well. Not so. Let me tell you how sick you really are.” Isn’t it more like this? The patient comes to the doc already ill, but most often ignorant. Possibly not even ignorant of the malady itself, but hooked on snake oil therapies for coping. Possibly even in the know about the affliction, and now in despair. The doc’s diagnosis doesn’t “preach” anything into the patient, but collects the patient’s data, runs them through a professional sieve and says: “Looks to me like cellulitis. Notice this and that symptom. Fit them together thus and so, it’s cellulitis.” The doc might even go further: “If we do nothing, here is where cellulitis patients wind up.” Note the three diagnostic steps of the Crossings matrix. Only when the doc moves to

therapeutic talk, do we get over to “preaching.” You can sketch that out too in the steps 4,5,6 of the Crossings prognosis sequence. (4) Cellulitis wilts when it meets medication X. (5) Here’s how you can get medication X into your system to have it work for you. (6) Here are some gospel-imperatives for living cellulitis-free in the specs of your daily life within the fellowship of the rest of us recovering patients.

If preaching really is a “Gospel-only” endeavor, would that change anything in the 3 “homiletical binds” for the preaching pastor? Would it add a fourth bind? Namely, to “preach” hellfire and brimstone in order to get the folks to say “uncle!” so that then, when you’ve “got ‘em,” you “preach” the good stuff. Is that law/gospel homiletics, or another kind of snake oil? Back to my first reason for all of this: It’s been good to journey along with you these many years in the law/gospel tradition. Thanks be to God.

13. Norb Kabelitz

Norb, your Octoberfest homily, almost on my birthday back in 1984 in Oklahoma City, at an “Ecumenical Service in St. Francis of Assisi Church on the occasion of the 47th Anniversary of the Reformation,” is a real hoot. I.e., good. What still makes me wonder, however, is your footnote: “This homily owes its inspiration to an Ecumenical Writing by Edward H. Schroeder.” Even after second reading of your script I can’t divine what ecumenical writing of mine is allegedly inspiring, conspiring—even perspiring—in, with and under your proclamation. It’s solid Reformation Gospel, but where, when, what did I write way back then that calls forth this footnote? I’m not sure I even was “ecumenical” let

alone “inspiringly” so, when I was “only” 53 yrs old.
Even so, Thanks be to God.

14. Robin Morgan

15. Sherman Lee

You two have been part of the troika for the two (count 'em, TWO) Festschrifts presented to me in my “senior years.” You invested, as I know from shoptalk with both of you, large slices of your lives for this 75th anniversary extravaganza publication. I also remember your initiative and effort (in nickel words, hard work) on that earlier one at the time of my retirement from honchoing the Crossings Community back in the early 90s. So I know that were it not for you two, neither Festschrift would have happened. So todah, todah, todah, todah. Two for each of you. The crisp articles you’ve contributed to this volume focus on Faith Place, the “city mission” new-start where you’re taking your long-learned and well-internalized Crossings theology out on the street into scruffy south St. Louis. If it won’t “work” here, it won’t work anywhere. Your final sentence, Sherm, pulls it together: “God willing, with Him waging battle for us in the War Zone, beckoning us from our Comfort Zones and into His Peace Zone, Faith Place and other missions will be able to continue to establish (as Robin pointed out) more holy ground.” So it IS working. Thanks be to God.

16. Marie A. Failing

Marie, did I really say that? I’m referring to the opening lines in your Festschrift essay. “I asked [Ed] casually in an email conversation something like the following: could a good Christian rightly believe that he or she was called to a vocation or an office if the people among whom he or she lived did not recognize that call: Ed’s brief and clear answer: no.” You grant that I

probably didn't know the "contexts in which I was thinking about this question." Even so, I wonder what I might have been thinking with that flatout "no." Surely not about my vocation—and dismissal therefrom—at Concordia Seminary in 1974. More likely your question caused my brain to "click on" to the program of the Augsburg Confession and its article on self-appointed preachers. That's a no-no, says AC 14, unless the candidate has a call from the outside, from some community, to corroborate the one on the inside. Now I know that you weren't thinking about that context at all, but were referencing what's in the title of your Festschrift gift to me: "Conscience, Commitment and Disobedience: The Case of Same-Sex Relationships." Given the massive case you make from Luther on conscience coupled with your own marvelous gift of reasoned reflection, I wouldn't dare to say "no" this time. As you know, on this hot-potato item we are on the same wavelength. So your birthday present essay brings joy. Still I have this question: Where did you learn all that Lutheran theology, the deep stuff, that you weave into this *amicus curiae* offering? Surely not from the days of our initial personal crossings in Valparaiso University theology classes.

Were you at V.U. at the time when some wag tagged me with the moniker "Crazy Ed?" [I'm not sure it was a term of endearment.] Valpo alums who later became seminarians in St. Louis brought it along, and so here too I was so labelled. I think someone even mentions it in the Festschrift.

However, seems to me that the real crazies are the contributors to this Festschrift. Not the least of them you with this track record. Studying law in the first

place(!), getting that Yale degree, wangling that post at Hamline Law School, editing the Law & Religion journal, taking on adoptive children as a single parent, getting to the deep stuff in Lutheran theology and crossing it like a pro with the world of your own vocation: jurisprudence. Are you really practicing the “-prudence” part of that vocation? Sounds more like crazy to me. What else but crazy was your recent foray out to Fordham University—granted, they invited you—to “splain” to the Jesuits there Luther’s (law-gospel-grounded) view of conscience and then have the chutzpah to cross it over to their own concerns about Vatican documents that they must cope with. I know what you told them. You sent me the paper. Crazy.

Bob Bertram liked to tell this story of Niels Bohr, pioneer quantum physics theorist. In one of Bohr’s graduate seminars a student was proposing a wild new theory and scribbling the blackboard full of equations to show its plausibility. When he finished, Bohr, having followed the argument closely, told the student: “Your proposal is crazy. The trouble is that it is not crazy enough!”

The opposite is my take on Marie Failing. Crazy enough. Thanks be to God.

17. Michael Hoy

18. Steven C Kuhl

Crazy enough—that’s surely true of you two too. So I’ll bunch you together, a dynamic duo for bringing the Festschrift to closure. It’s also true that my energy level is a tad lower than it was when I started this todah. So I won’t pick up right now on the good stuff you give me. Some later time when (better) we can do so face-

to-face, even though we have shop-talked both topics earlier on. They are at the center of our common life and planetary survival: "The Ethics of War and Peace" and "God in the Science and Politics of Food." Later. But back to crazy enough. The two of you—Mike first, Steve currently—have been crazy enough to accept the leadership of The Crossings Community after we goldie-oldies relinquished the reins. Crazy enough to keep the S.A.L.T. conversations going. You, Steve, continue to be crazy enough to keep on keeping on as a Lutheran prof in a Roman Catholic Seminary. You, Mike, wear several hats, some of them the equivalent of full-time jobs on their own. And you too keep on keeping on. I know that there is more of the same that I don't know.

So, crazy enough you are—like your respective namesakes—Protomartyr Stephen (Monday was his Saint's Day) and Proto-Messenger Michael of Revelation 12. You look, and sound, very much like your prototypes. Thanks be to God.