

Theology of the Cross. Richard Koenig in memoriam

Colleagues,

This post was in the pipeline before I learned of Dick Koenig's dying earlier this week on the very cusp of October 31, Reformation Day (aka the Eve of All Saints Day), turning into All Saints Day, November 1. What marvelous timing for one of the knights exemplar during the Missouri Synod wars of a generation ago. Among his memorable—and often earthy—bons mots was this one: "Justification by faith alone is the bullshit-detector of the Lutheran Reformation. Whenever someone proposes that you need just a little of this or that in addition to trusting Christ's promise in order to be A-OK with God, you should stop them right there and say 'That's BS.'"

Dick's name has appeared off and on in these Thursday posts over the years. His last contribution—ThTh #616—was on April 1, 2010, "The Future of Justification." <https://crossings.org/thursday/2010/thur040110.shtml> [Put his name in the box at the internal google system on the Crossings website to see more of his presence among us.]

What follows below—pretty far down actually—works from the same cantus firmus. Now posted in gratitude for the life and work of Richard. Requiescat in pace!

Ed Schroeder

When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the riverside, into which as he went he said, "Death, where is thy sting?" and as he went down deeper, he said "Grave,

where is thy victory?" So he passed over, and the trumpets sounded for him on the other side. [John Bunyan. Pilgrim's Progress. 1678.]

Colleagues,

Still sifting through those file cabinet drawers to reduce "stuff" so that we'll finally fit into our new digs here at Hidden Lake Senior Retirement Community, in north suburban St. Louis. [Don't remember what I've told you about our new digs. If curious, check this out: Still a few unoccupied units available. Come join us.]

Here's what I came up with this time. Something I'd totally forgotten! An unfinished book! How could I forget? Answer: It must have been forgettable. Though now that I look at the four finished chapters, it doesn't seem to be THAT bad.

It comes from the days of the one and only sabbatical (1978-79) that ever came my way during all my years of teaching [1957 – 1994].

1978-79 was right at the middle of Seminex's decade of existence 1974 – 1983. We thought we were going to Hyderabad, India. The principal of the Lutheran Seminary there had asked me to come for a year as guest lecturer. Everything was set. Except for the visa. Which dragged on and on. One delay after another. I even invoked Senator Paul Simon, a friend from earlier days, to plead my case at the Indian embassy in Washington DC. Which he did. But to no avail. Finally there came a flat-out "No! Someone else has been found to take the position." A costly (in those days) phone call to the principal in Hyderabad indicated that was not true, but he had no clout in Delhi, so we weren't going to India. And now it was November. When the fall semester began

in St. Louis, we'd rented out our house to a Semtex student family, so ever since the fall term began, we were sojourning from the spare bedroom of one friend in St. Louis to that of another.

Semtex missiologist Bill Danker came to the rescue. "Want to get third-world exposure? Go to New Jersey." He wasn't joking. In Ventnor NJ (suburb of Atlantic City) was the Overseas Ministries Study Center, gathering place/study place for mission-linked folks from all over the world, most of them Asian, African, Latino. We'd never heard of it, but Bill knew the director, Gerald Anderson, major figure in the missiology world—as was Bill. He made connections and right after Thanksgiving our Toyota Corolla was heading to Ventnor.

But what to do there, besides join the program and get "exposed"? Well, in my original application to my academic dean for a sabbatical the year before, I'd proposed writing a book on Luther's Theology of the Cross. But that was set aside when the exotic India option arrived. So with India out, it was back to the book. And that meant schlepping all 55 volumes of Luther's Works (English edition) along with our stuff and youngest high-school daughter Gail in our teensy Toyota to OMSC.

Where I got mesmerized by the OMSC program, introduced to the whole missiological world (completely unknown to me before), and encountered major theologians from those other worlds.

Result: #1) I got hooked on missiology and #2) the book didn't get done. But three chapters—of a proposed eleven—did. After all, I was obligated to my dean to bring back SOMETHING when I got home to St. Louis again. But there was a detour on that coming back home too. Someone helped me get to Geneva, Switzerland, right after term ended at OMSC—now it's Summer 1979— for a conference sponsored by the World Council of

Churches on Worship and the Arts in Asian and African Churches. That ecumenical exposure was icing on the cake. People I met there, e.g., Lobi Sifobela from Zimbabwe, are dear friends to this day.

Back in St. Louis later that summer—after I reported to the dean what I had (and had not) done on my sabbatical—the three chapters and outlines for the other eight were properly filed. The Sturm und Drang—and Joy!—of daily work at Seminex took over, and “the book” slid off the screen. I still don’t understand why that happened.

Well, enough of this shaggy dog story. You may not want to read any more. But if you do, here’s the original proposal for that book. If Richard Koenig had ever seen it, I can imagine him saying “Ed, that’s just a set of variations on my BS-detector axiom.” He’d be right.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

A Sabbatical Research Project

THE CROSS AS FORM AND CONTENT is a proposal for studying Luther’s theology as a coherent unity, a system. It sees his reformation work centered on the one “doctrine evangelic,” the gospel itself, as the one and only doctrine of the Christian faith. From this hub radiate all the spokes of Luther’s evangelical system, and back to which hub these spokes direct the reader/hearer.

It seeks to expose Luther’s theology as a praxis theology wherein his system functions as blueprint from which he does his pastoral and professorial and reformatory work. During his lifetime both blueprint and praxis interact to modify and

correct each other.

This first draft outline of the work begins with a two-chapter prolegomena, followed by the fundamental "hub" chapter, and concluding with eight chapters for eight "spokes." The number eight here is arbitrary. It could be more or less. At present the final eight consist of two sets of four chapters each. The first four (4 through 7) focus on individual Christian existence, the final four (8 through 11) on corporate Christian existence.

In each chapter one or two of Luther's writings serve as the primary texts from which his own theology is drawn. My intention is to read these Luther texts in large measure as his own Biblical exegesis, which basically they claim to be, and thus to keep Biblical data in the running narrative of each chapter.

Since Luther's own theology was regularly produced in conflict contexts, I shall seek to give an accurate picture of the antithetical alternatives to which he is saying "no." My present perception of what is being negated by him is as follows, chapter for chapter: 1) theologies of glory, 2) Christ-less and comfort-less exegesis, 3) legalized Christs and legal salvations, 4) Erasmian anthropologies, 5) moralist or libertine ethics, 6) cheap grace, 7) authority blurs, 8) triumphal ecclesiasts, 9) cross-less pneumatics, 10) blind pastors, 11) mystical or secularist proposals for daily Christian life. It is my intention to devote considerable space in each chapter indicating where in contemporary theology and church life these tempting alternatives are present and operative and then to bring them up against the hub so that they might be reformed.

The two prolegomena chapters propose in chapter one to demonstrate that Luther's most revolutionary word is his critique of the dominant medieval theologies as theologies of

glory in conflict with the theology of the cross proclaimed by the Scriptures. This is an upset in both form and content for theology. Chapter one will seek to probe the formal and methodological aspects of these two clean contraries. Chapter two is an investigation of Biblical hermeneutics as they take shape under a theology of the cross.

Chapter three will seek to present God's Good News in Christ, the hub of the wheel, under the rubric of "cruciform promise," and to do so mostly by drawing contrasts to the largely promise-less atonement model of Anselm in the heritage which the 16th century had received.

Chapter four through eleven take a spoke at a time, present the material appropriate to the chapter title, seeking all the while to illuminate the linkage between this particular spoke and the hub. My intended watchwords for my prose (received from my teacher Werner Elert) are: simplify, clarify, specify.

At present I have no clearly perceived finale for the work other than the material with which chapter eleven will conclude.

Edward H. Schroeder
St. Louis, Missouri
5 November 1977

THE CROSS AS FORM AND CONTENT: System in Luther's Theology

I. PROLEGOMENA

Chapter 1. Theological Method – The critique of medieval theology under the rubric Theology of Glory. (Heidelberg Theses; 97 Theses Against Scholasticism)

Chapter 2. Biblical Hermeneutics – "Christum treiben" [urging Christ] as clue to reading the Scriptures. Law/promise lenses as the reading glasses. (Introduction to the Biblical Books –

1522)

II. THE HUB

Chapter 3. God's Cruciform Promise in Jesus the Christ – The surprising salvation from a crucified Messiah. (Sermons on I Cor.15; Good Friday / Easter Sermons; The Apostles Creed in Small and Large Catechisms)

III. SOME SPOKES

Chapter 4. Adamic Humanity – the conflict over Biblical anthropology. (Exegesis of Psalm 90; Bondage of the Will)

Chapter 5. The Novelty of Christian Existence: Freedom. (On Christian Liberty)

Chapter 6. The Hidden Discipline of Daily Repentance. (95 Theses)

Chapter 7. God's Two Kingdoms in His One World – Christian existence under God's ambidextrous authorities. (On Secular Authority. Peasant War Writings)

Chapter 8. The Trademarks of Christ's Cruciform Church. (On Councils and the Church)

Chapter 9. The Holy Spirit's Work in Spirited People. (Against the Heavenly Prophets)

Chapter 10. Rightly Dividing Law and Promise: Luther's proposal for preaching and pastoral care. (Galatians Commentary)

Chapter 11. The Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments – Resourcing Christ's people for the ongoing struggle in exile. (Small and Large Catechisms)