

"THE QUEST FOR SOMETHING BETTER":

THE HISTORY OF MISSIONARY THOMAS FREI'S
COLLOQUY FROM THE EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
TO THE WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

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4-14-92

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11831 W. Washington Ave. 65W
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INTRODUCTION

When a seminarian returns to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for his senior year, his most vivid and concrete views of ministry have been shaped by his vicar year. In many cases it's the only taste of representative ministry he's had up to that point. Therefore, it's a given that the Seminary senior's questions and answers are filtered through his vicar year experience. Because of the impact of that ministerial experience, it is only natural that many times when a senior opens his mouth in class something similar to "When I was vicaring..." is going to come out. Such words usually draw chuckles from one's classmates and a smile from the professor. What does this have to do with the colloquy of Missionary Thomas Frei? I met Tom "When I was vicaring..." and when I returned to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to utter words like "When I was vicaring...", Tom was sitting just two desks away from me.

It was on Sunday, August 26th, 1990, that I met Tom. It was toward the end of what had been a very exciting and busy day. I had been installed as vicar at St. Paul Lutheran in Tomah, Wisconsin, during the 10:30am service. Following the service the congregation held a potluck fellowship dinner to welcome several new teachers and my family. By the time 1:30pm rolled around I was understandably tired. My mind had been racing in an attempt to remember the names and faces of the many people to whom I had been introduced. It was at that point when Tom and his wife Melanie introduced themselves to me.

They most graciously welcomed me and explained that they had only been at the congregation a week themselves. The significance that I attached to that at the time was, "Wow, only members a week and they stayed for a fellowship meal and were outgoing enough to come up and introduce themselves." There are several things which the new vicar did not as yet realize about the man to whom he had just been introduced.

When they introduced themselves to me, Tom and Melanie and their sons, Jonathan and Eric, were not even members yet. That would not happen for several months. Most significantly, however, I had just met a former missionary to Hong Kong from the Evangelical Free Church. I had met a reformed pastor who would later become the first non-Lutheran pastor since at least the turn of the century, if not ever, to colloquy into the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

In the days to follow, I gradually learned from my supervising pastor, John Kuske, what the situation was for the Freis. This interested me greatly. I thought it most uncommon that a Reformed minister would colloquy into our fellowship. Later I discovered just how unique of an occurrence this was. Because of its uniqueness, Tom Frei's journey from the Evangelical Free Church to the WELS is fascinating and well worth documenting.

EARLY LIFE

As an infant Tom was baptized Lutheran. At age five, his

family moved to Kenosha, Wisconsin, where they became members of a Lutheran church and Tom attended Sunday school for a short time until his family left the Lutheran church.

When Tom was about twelve years old, a pastor of one of the Independent Fundamentalist Churches of America contacted his parents. They joined this church. Tom was rebaptized and began to attend Sunday school at this church. This was to be Tom's church home until he began college.

As he began college, his home church went through a split. As a result of his home congregation's split, Tom was open to the invitation of some good friends. They invited him to their church and so Tom ended up going to another denomination, the Evangelical Free Church. Of this switch from the Independent Fundamentalist Churches of America to the Evangelical Free Church Tom says,

If you ask me, "What is the difference between the two?" I would say that I couldn't tell you any difference. So, this was no traumatic change. It was just that after the split, I had some friends over at the other church and the ones I felt closest to at the original church left and went elsewhere. So, that was my first contact with the Evangelical Free Church.

PASTORAL TRAINING

During Tom's last year of college, his interest in missionary work began. He had the opportunity to go to Indonesia as a short term missionary. Before returning to complete his college education, he spent three months teaching English and helping the missionaries build friendships with the nationals.

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin - Parkside,

Tom joined the Navy. Upon fulfilling his Navy requirements, he enrolled at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, the Evangelical Free Church's seminary in Deerfield, Illinois. With his eye on world missions, here he filled his schedule with missionary electives.

At the end of his time at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Tom was accepted as a candidate in the Free Church Mission. This meant spending time at a three week orientation school. It is here that he met his future wife, Melanie.

In the Evangelical Free Church the person accepted as a missionary candidate is the same one who goes out and gathers support for the mission he will serve. They do not have Synod Mission Subscriptions. Rather, each individual congregation has the opportunity to directly support a world missionary.

Originally as missionary candidates for Malaysia, Tom and Melanie received the names of individuals and congregations which were interested in supporting a mission. Then they visited these contacts to explain what they hoped to do in Malaysia and to gain financial, as well as spiritual, support for their future missionary venture.

While waiting for a mission opportunity, Tom served a small congregation in Nebraska for a year. Of this he comments, "It was good pastoral experience. All I had before that was the academic training." This experience would be similar to our vicar program, because Tom was not actually ordained until after he had served this congregation and just before he left for Hong Kong.

HONG KONG

After Tom had been in Nebraska a year, the Evangelical Free Church's Mission, which is similar to our Board of World Missions, decided it was time for Tom to finish the support raising process for a mission to Malaysia. This final portion of the support raising process lasted about another year and a half.

The first year of that time was spent gaining support for missionary work in Malaysia, but the plans for a mission in Malaysia ran into a brick wall. Malaysia, being an Islamic republic, is not that open to westerners, especial Christian missionaries. Malaysia never did grant visas to the Freis. Tom says, "I don't think the visa application ever got off the first desk it was placed on."

With work among the Chinese people of Malaysia looking impossible, it was decided that Tom's help could be used among another group of Chinese people, the people of Hong Kong. The last six months of State-side support raising was done with eyes focused on Hong Kong, and it is there that the Freis then went.

Tom was missionary to Hong Kong for four years (1986-1990). Upon entering Hong Kong the first two years were spent primarily in study of the Cantonese language. The following two years still included some language study, but most of Tom's energies were

devoted to using the Cantonese language in mission work and other church duties. One of his specific areas of responsibility was teaching at the Free Church's theological seminary in Hong Kong. Here he taught in English the course on theological English.

DOCTRINAL CHANGES

To trace the doctrinal changes which Tom went through we have to jump back a bit to when Tom was in the Navy. While Tom was in the Navy, a good friend of his had been attending Trinity Divinity School. But prior to Tom's enrolling at Trinity, this good friend became a Lutheran and had enrolled at Concordia, Fort Wayne.

Tom and his friend talked about this dramatic change from Reformed to Lutheran, especially the change to the Lutheran view of the Sacraments. Tom now states "It didn't make a whole lot of sense to me, but I really respected him and had a trust that he was honestly searching the Scriptures and so I also wanted to look into the Scriptures and find out what it says about Baptism and the Lord's Supper."

One of his friend's questions in particular motivated Tom to search the Scriptures regarding the Lord's Supper. Tom recalls that penetrating question.

My friend Dave asked me, "Now Tom, you believe in the pre-millennial second coming of Christ, interpreting 'thousand years' in Revelation 20 literally?" And I said, "Yes. I do." "Yet you realize that the book of Revelation is full of symbols. Why do you take a thousand years literally, when all these other numbers you find as having

symbolic meaning?" I said, "Well, that's a good question."

But then he went on to say, "Yet in the Gospel narratives, the last week of Christ's life, including the Last Supper, there is nothing symbolic there. It's straight forward narrative and yet you insist that 'This is my body' has to be interpreted in a symbolic way. Can you account for this strange inconsistency?" And that was troubling to me, and that was really the beginning.

At this point Tom resolved to find out what exactly the Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper was and more importantly from what Scripture Lutherans drew their understanding. To aid him in understanding the doctrine of the Real Presence, Tom used J.T. Mueller's Christian Dogmatics. (It is interesting to note that Mueller's dogmatics was actually one of the text books at Trinity Divinity School for a class Tom was taking.) During this search Tom says, "In particular I wanted to in my own hermeneutics interpret the Bible literally whenever possible." While serving in Nebraska and later gaining mission support, his study led him to this conclusion, "When I found out that it was basically rationalistic kinds of arguments that were used to displace the literal interpretation of those words 'This is my body", finally I said 'I have no real reason to reject this literal interpretation anymore.'"

This doctrinal change on the Lord's Supper came about even before Tom was ordained. Prior to being sent to Hong Kong, Tom was to be ordained into the ministry of the Evangelical Free Church. For ordination in the Free Church the candidate is required to write an ordination thesis on the twelve doctrinal statements of

the church body. Then the candidate appears before an ordination council to answer questions based on the ordination paper and the twelve points.

When Tom wrote his ordination paper, he was totally honest about his understanding of the Lord's Supper at that time. At that time he was not distinguishing between the terminology of Consubstantiation and Real Presence, so he used the term Consubstantiation. He referred to the presence of Christ's body and blood by using Luther's familiar phrase "in, with, and under" the bread and wine. But, at this time he had not yet come to the understanding that the Lord's Supper was a means of grace and following his statements about the true body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament he held to the Free Church position: They are not to be regarded as means of salvation.

Having made such bold and clear statements about the Sacramental Union, Tom was sure he would be thoroughly questioned on the matter by the ordination council and came prepared to defend his position. "Nobody asked me a question on it," Tom still recalls with a bit of surprise in his voice. He surmises that the ordination council must have just been looking for key phrases in his paper and must have not been concerned what a candidate thought about the Sacramental Union as long as the candidate still confessed, "They are not to be regarded as means of salvation."

Several years later, just before leaving Hong Kong, Tom was visited by the president of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and also the head of the committee on ministerial standing. Tom

remembers their conversations concerning his change in doctrinal position,

It was kind of a shock to me. He said that no one on the committee, no one at the ordination council, not even the president of the denomination, realized that I was holding the Lutheran view. And if they had noticed, I would not have been ordained, because they consider that a red flag, a sign that this person is sitting on the fence. He doesn't know if he's Reformed or if he's Lutheran and before he's ordained, he better figure out which side of the fence he's on.

Tom is still surprised that an ordination committee of fifteen to twenty men, including Free Church professors and members of their doctrinal committee, did not see this "red flag" when they were supposed to be especially looking for just such a thing in an ordination paper.

Tom was ordained in the Evangelical Free Church and sent to Hong Kong. It is then, while teaching at the Free Church's seminary in Hong Kong that his doctrinal change on the Means of Grace began to take place.

Tom describes what his real problem had been when looking at the Sacraments as Means of Grace. "I believed in eternal security (Once saved, always saved). Now, if I also said that Baptism is a means of salvation, Adolf Hitler was baptized as an infant. Was I suppose to see Adolf Hitler in heaven? It just doesn't make any sense."

Prior to this time, Tom on the basis of Scripture had already come to the very strong conviction that five point Calvinism was wrong. He had concluded that the third point, "Limited Atonement"

was wrong. The Scriptures clearly teach universal grace.

Now Tom had only one question standing in his way of understanding the Means of Grace. He still had the same rational question in his mind that has been a stumbling block to more than one theologian: Why are some saved and not others? Martin Luther gave him the answer to this perplexing question in his Bondage of the Will.

Luther ends the treatise by discussing the light of nature, the light of grace, and the light of glory (LW 33:289-292). Luther spoke to Tom and helped him realize,

There are some things under the light of nature that you can't answer. Under the light of grace, there's an answer. And this ["Why some and not others?"] is a question in the light of grace you can't answer. Scripture does not tell you and if you try to get an answer that satisfies human reason, you are going to end up contradicting one line of Scripture or the other, either the salvation by grace alone or universal grace. The Christian thing to do is just affirm both of these doctrines and wait for the light of glory to give an answer.

With reason's stumbling block removed, Tom could look at the Scriptures in a new light. What God said reigned supreme. Reason was now captive to God's Word. Tom looked at everything Scripture had to say about Calvinism's "Irresistible Grace" and "Perseverance of the Saints". He saw that Scripture taught neither and says, "I became much more open to what the Scriptures say about one losing his salvation and then I realized, 'My number one objection against Baptism as a means of salvation has withered away.'"

The catalyst for Tom regarding himself as a Lutheran came

about as a result of a seminary student's question. That day in class Tom was teaching the English words "Transubstantiation", "Real Presence", and "Symbolic" and the concepts behind each term. He put "Transubstantiation" on the far left of the blackboard, "Real Presence" in the middle, and "Symbolic" on the far right. While explaining how each position understands the nature of Christ's presence in the Sacrament and purpose of the Sacrament, a student asked him, "Is the Lutheran view leaning toward the one side or the other side? Or is it right in between?" Tom explains his thoughts that followed.

I felt that I should say that it was leaning toward the symbolic view, because here I am every month having communion with people that hold the symbolic view. That's the answer that humanly speaking I wanted to give. But, I remembered that Luther said, "I would rather drink blood with the Pope than drink mere wine with Zwingli." So that's what I told the student.

Yet after the class I thought, "What does Luther see in this that I don't see, because I don't feel at all an inconsistency in my practice. And yet Luther finds his position much closer to the Pope." So, I had to go back and redo my work, because there's something I missed here.

About that time I also realized that in one of the books which the former president of the Free Church had written he made this statement. "Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not to be regarded as means for salvation... came as a result of the rejection of the teaching of the Lutheran church." Now to me that was as plain as can be that you can't be Lutheran and be in the Evangelical Free Church.

Answering these questions in Scripture, it wasn't a very long time when I began to think of the Lutheran view as not just the Lutheran

view, but as the Biblical view and as my view. That's when I realized I was in trouble. Because, "if what this former president of the Free Church said is true, then I can not continue signing the doctrinal statement and remain in the Free Church mission."

Until this time these questions concerning the Lord Supper and Baptism had been Tom's private thoughts. Upon realizing that there was a good possibility he could not remain in the Free Church mission, it was time to share his conclusions first with his wife, Melanie, and then with his mission field supervisor.

What lay ahead for Tom and Melanie were many hours of discussion regarding the Sacraments. Melanie was at the disadvantage of never really having had cause to do deep study on these things before. She says, "It took me three months to even learn the terminology." Tom had thought about the Sacraments in depth. There was much ground to cover to bring her to the point where Tom was. Even later, when Tom had already decided to resign, there was still much ground to cover. In order to do in-depth study on the subject, Tom and Melanie got their children a babysitter and then went on a weekend retreat. It was just the two of them, their Bibles, and J.T. Mueller's Christian Dogmatics for reference. At the end of the retreat weekend, Scripture had convinced Melanie to have their boys, Jonathan and Eric, baptized.

While Tom and Melanie were privately discussing Tom's change in doctrine, Tom was also communicating this change to his superiors in the Free Church. He told his mission field supervisor of the change. He still wondered if the phrase "Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not to be regarded as means of salvation" was

coined especially over against Real Presence, so he wrote to the head theologian of the Free Church. It was only months before they were scheduled to come back to the states for furlough and to visit the congregations that were supporting them, and Tom wanted to know before coming home, if he would be returning to the mission in Hong Kong.

Tom also wrote an eight page ordination thesis supplement concerning the Sacraments and sent it to the Free Church's committee on ministerial standing. In this paper Tom made it clear that this had to be resolved or he would not be staying in the mission. But, the committee never wrote back. Tom was baffled and upset that they would not respond to his paper. He says,

I was asking some important questions about whether I stay or leave and nobody responded. Melanie was waiting to hear the other side, because she for the longest time didn't want to take my view seriously, because, "Obviously so many scholars in the Free Church couldn't be wrong. There are answers to your questions. Just wait."

No response. I could not believe that these people would be doing their job and not wanting to discuss these points.

The only reply Tom was given from any officials in the Free Church was that he should come to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and study under some professors for a while. To this Tom replied that before he would do that, they would have to give him some Scripture passages backing the Free Church's position on the Sacraments. What response did Tom get to this?

You may laugh at this, but this never-the-less is true. The only Scripture that I was

ever given was 1 Co 1:17 where Paul says, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.."

My response was, "Wait a minute. That is suppose to prove that Baptism is not a means of salvation?" I said, "If that's all the better you can do, then I'm resigning with a very good conscience." And it [that one passage] really was all they had.

Ironically the Free Church's motto is "Where stands it written?"

Tom was to the point of resigning his call and was experiencing new insight on the church. At this time the key phrase for Tom was "the church is 'the pillar and foundation of truth'"(1Ti 3:15). This brought about some radical changes in how he viewed doctrinal unity in the Free Church as well as significant events in church history.

The church has to be speaking forth the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

In the Free Church, for example, it's just notorious. They've got Calvinist and they've got Arminians. I expected the ordination council to have a lot of questions about my position. I got only one question. "Can you as a Calvinist cooperate with the rest of us who are Arminians?" I said, "Yes." They dropped that subject and never came back to it.

There is just no unity in the church. Some say this and some say just the opposite, and it doesn't seem to bother anybody.

Yet I was beginning to realize...I had always been taught that at the Marburg Colloquy that Zwingli was the open-minded person. He was sensitive and wanted unity and harmony among Christians, and all these great virtues. And, Luther was just bullheaded, narrow-minded, a traditionalist who put his

traditions ahead of the Word of God. This is the way it was presented to me. So, his [Luther's] refusal to shake hands and practice fellowship with Zwingli was just one of the worst things that a church leader could have done.

But, now I began to realize that the reason why Luther did that was because the church is the pillar of truth and you can't have two contrary doctrines both claiming to be the truth in the church of God, because the Holy Spirit doesn't contradict Himself. So, either both of these people are inspired by the devil, or one of them is and the other one is speaking the truth of God. But, you can't have both of them in the same Church.

Once this insight began, I began to realize that the whole doctrinal foundation of this Church [the Free Church] is rotten and as soon as somebody like the little boy in the story The Emperor's New Clothes says, "The Emperor is naked!", there's going to be a whole lot of embarrassment. But, we are trained in the Free Church never to bring up these questions. So, the Calvinists just keep it to themselves. The Arminians keep it to themselves. The result is just a big vacuum.

What happened in this whole thing, and Melanie often says the same thing, is our confidence in the Scriptures as the truth from God was energized. In a lot of these things I just think we were just trained to stay away from the question, because there is no answer and we just have to wait again until Christ comes again to get any answer. But, until that time let's all just keep harmony in the Church. But I realized that this was not a Scriptural doctrine of the church and if I was in Hong Kong planting Churches, this was not the kind of Church I wanted to be planting.

Before he resigned, Tom did one more thing. He read F. Pieper's Christian Dogmatics from cover to cover. He already knew that his pre-millennialistic ideas were not held in the Lutheran Church and he wanted to see "if there were some other major

doctrines that would cause problems." In approaching this study Tom's attitude was that he was going to be open to what Scripture said. Without his millennium questions fully resolved, two months before he was to leave Hong Kong on furlough, Tom decided that they would not be returning. He notified his superiors and his supporting congregations that he was resigning his call (cf. Addendum 1).

CONTACT WITH WELS

If Tom was going to make the switch from Reformed to Lutheran, it would seem only natural that he would return to the United States and get some advise from his good friend who had been in the Free Church and had attended Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, but then went to Concordia, Fort Wayne and became a Lutheran pastor. That would have been Tom's plan, but a few months before Tom decided to leave Hong Kong the Lord called his friend home to heaven.

When Tom decided to resign, his Free Church mission field supervisor asked him if he knew anyone in the Lutheran Church. At this point Tom didn't know anyone in the Lutheran Church. His field supervisor suggested, "Why don't I introduce you to my neighbor, who is a Lutheran missionary with the Wisconsin Synod?" That neighbor was Missionary Gary Schroeder.

I asked Tom if this was the first time he had ever heard of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. "No. Actually I had one other context, and that was while I was studying at Trinity. I

found out that the Wisconsin Synod had broke with Missouri over the inerrancy question. So, my opinion of the Wisconsin Synod was high just from that little bit that I knew."

The first time the Free Church field supervisor mentioned to Gary Schroeder that he had a Free Church missionary "who seemed to be leaning toward the Lutheran view of things and wondering if he needed to resign. Gary Schroeder spoke very sharply and said, 'You tell that guy to stay put.' He thought, 'Here's some guy who can't get along with his people. He's looking for greener pastures. What he needs is a strong rebuke.'"

Later when Tom spoke with Gary Schroeder and Missionary Schroeder found out that Tom had been reading J.T. Mueller and F. Pieper's Dogmatics as well as Sasse's This is My Body and heard Tom articulate the Scriptural view, Missionary Schroeder realized that Tom was not just looking for "greener pastures".

Once Missionary Schroeder realized Tom's position was sincere, he asked if Melanie would like to meet with him for instructions. Melanie recalls that he said to her, "I know you're never going to read the books that Tom has read, or catch up with where he's at, but I will be willing to meet with you."

Melanie was impressed with missionary Schroeder's concern.

He was really concerned that I understand the truth question. What really is true? What does the Scripture say? And, it was my experience that while people were praying that Tom and I would be single-minded in this whole thing, realizing that Tom had shifted and I didn't really realize what was going on, not one single person in our circle of friends asked me, "Well, Melanie, what do you really think is true?" Not one person that I recall

asked the truth question. "We have two views here. Which one does the Bible really say?" Yet, here is this Gary Schroeder, who doesn't know me at all, who volunteers to sit down and say, "Let's study."

It was following some instruction from Missionary Schroeder and Tom and Melanie's private weekend retreat that Missionary Schroeder baptized Jonathan and Eric. Shortly after this, it was time to return to the States and when they returned they carried with them a letter of introduction which Gary Schroeder had written.

I asked Tom if because of his contact with Missionary Schroeder, he knew that he was going to join the WELS upon arriving back in the States. He replied,

I had just gotten to the point of resigning from the Free Church. It was kind of ironic. While I was in Hong Kong, I had quite an extensive debate with a missionary from ELCA. I probably realized that I wasn't going to fit in there, so it limits my choices to Missouri Synod or Wisconsin Synod. That was basically what I was thinking when I came back to the states.

BACK IN THE U.S.

When they arrived back in the U.S., Tom and Melanie decided to stay with Tom's parents until they knew exactly what they would be doing. This brought them to Tomah, Wisconsin in August of 1990. Soon after arriving, they were driving down the main street in Tomah, when they saw St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church and School. They noticed it was WELS. They shared some of their first

impressions of St. Paul Lutheran.

We stopped by just to get information about Vacation Bible School. Nobody was there, but we happened to see the Bible that was used in the Church. Now we heard that the Wisconsin Synod was conservative and in my mind I was thinking, "Ahh, they use the King James Bible." And, there was the New International Bible. We were just getting first impressions and this was a good one.

Eventually they did get in contact with someone and enrolled Jonathan in St. Paul's VBS. Because St. Paul offered VBS also for adults, Tom and Melanie were able to meet and get to know some other couples about their age.

This also gave them the opportunity to meet Pastor John Kuske. Tom gave Pastor Kuske the letter of introduction from Missionary Schroeder and also filled him in on their background. Pastor Kuske offered to meet with Tom and Melanie for adult instructions.

The Freis also were interested in enrolling Jonathan in St. Paul's Christian elementary school. They were very encouraged by their meeting with Principal David Fehlauer. His friendliness and willingness to help made a lasting impression on Tom and Melanie. Soon after their meeting with David Fehlauer, they enrolled Jonathan in St. Paul's first grade.

This was a key step toward joining St. Paul and the WELS. In a letter to friends and former supporting congregations Tom and Melanie explained,

In the States we attended a Wisconsin Evangelical church and liked it. Should we join? This became a matter of serious prayer and thought. Since Jonathan had attended three years of Chinese kindergarten, we wanted him to start first grade. The public school

declared him too young, but the WELS Christian school accepted him. It seemed that God had led us to the very door of the Wisconsin Synod and then through Jonathan's schooling needs gave a push so that we stepped inside (cf. Addendum 2).

As Jonathan started school, so did Tom and Melanie in a sense. They started their instructions with Pastor Kuske. They went through the Bible information course New Life in Christ. Tom describes these classes as sometimes "difficult". Melanie says, "Every week there came up some new thing that I didn't know was part of this whole package. I kept getting theologically surprised." Pastor Kuske offered whatever help he could and would often give them more to read on any subject which caused some difficulty.

One area of difficulty and a large obstacle for them to overcome yet was pre-millennialism. This was especially difficult for Tom. "When I came back to the States," Tom says, "I was still a pre-millennialist and was not able to be accepted into the Wisconsin Synod." Melanie described the situation Tom was facing. "For a period of time he was Lutheran in his theology of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, but certainly very non-Wisconsin Synod by being pre-millennial. That put him as basically a man without a Church."

Melanie stated that her departure from pre-millennialism was no where near as difficult as was her change to the Lutheran views on Baptism, Lord's Supper, and Fellowship.

That was an issue that was extremely easy

for me to shift on when we were going through our Bible information class. The only eschatology I had ever had was pre-millennialism. I went to Moody and that's a very strong pre-millennialism school. I had never even heard the word millennium until I went to Moody and of course amillennialists were just stated in carefree terms and then just brushed off. So, that was all the education I had on that [amillennialism].

But, I never felt comfortable with millennialism. I just never had been taught anything else. It had a lot of gaping whole questions. I had gone to one day seminars on pre-millennialism, and when the speaker lays it out, it all sounds so together. Then I'd go home and say, "Now if I had to explain that to somebody else, could I even begin?" It just seemed so complicated.

So when we went to the Bible information class and amillennialism was explained there, it was really very simple for me to shift and I felt much more comfortable with the whole position. Now for Tom it was a very emotional shift.

Tom explains the difficulty of his shift from pre-millennialism.

The pastor who disciplined me at this Independent Fundamentalist Church was pre-millennialist. I was getting pre-millennialism right along with the ABC's of Christian doctrine and Christian life. It was right along side the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed. So, in my mind it had about the same authority as all of these others. So, it really shook me up when I came to this point.

The way that I had been taught to interpret the Bible is like the cultus. Take a little here and a little there. Twist that and twist this. I just had to be very strong in opposing it. It was just an emotion thing.

I use this comparison with the millennial question. It's sort of like crab grass. The crab grass starts at one point and sets

runners out all over the lawn, until finally when you start picking from up here, you find that you have to pull it up over here and it's connected over there. The whole yard becomes that way.

It just seemed like there were so many Bible verses from all over the Bible that had been drawn into the millennial doctrine in order to bolster it.

Right now the main text, Revelation 20, I see a different way of interpreting it and I'm satisfied with that interpretation. But, I know that intellectually and emotionally I've got to go around through the whole Bible and just start uprooting the millennial interpretation or perversion of the interpretation of the verses.

As he began adult instructions Tom didn't know what was going to happen. He recalls,

I didn't know if I would ever be accepted as a pastor or missionary again. So, I actually went to the University of LaCrosse to check out their teacher training program as a second choice. But, I finally just had to think, "If it's at all possible to be accepted into the Lutheran Church and become a pastor, that's what I'd like to do." That's what all my training has been leading up to and I know that the world needs more pastors and missionaries. And, it would be terrible to be like that lazy servant (Mt 25:18), who took his one talent and buried it.

Besides the adult information classes Tom was studying on his own.

I was still a pre-millennialist... but I had come to the point of saying like with these other matters [Baptism and Lord's Supper], "I'm open to what the Scriptures teach. I've found the Lutheran Church right on these other things. So, I will give them the benefit of doubt and see if their teaching on this is also Scriptural." I did a lot of studying that fall.

Tom did indeed do a lot of studying that fall. St. Paul Church had a rather extensive Church library. I would quite often run into Tom down in the library or as he came up the stairs with a stack of books to take home. He was basically reading every sound piece of Lutheran literature he could get his hands on.

COLLOQUY

Pastor Kuske contacted Pastor Karl Gurgel, president of the Western Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod. Arrangements were made for Tom to meet Pastor Gurgel in Lake Mills, Wisconsin. Upon meeting Tom and Melanie, Pastor Gurgel made arrangements for them to go to Mequon, Wisconsin, to speak with Dean Richard Balge of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and also to go to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to meet with Pastor Daniel Koelpin, the chairman of the Executive Committee for Southeast Asian Missions of the WELS. All the meetings went well.

In accordance with the Unified Interview Process For Those Seeking A Colloquy, which was adopted by the Conference of Presidents on 4/18/90, Tom was asked to supply references which the Western Wisconsin Praesidium could contact (cf. Addendum 3).

A formal meeting was set with the Praesidium in September of 1990. Melanie was also included in this meeting. At this meeting the Praesidium worked to get to know Tom and Melanie, where they were coming from, and why Tom was seeking a colloquy into our fellowship (cf. Addendum 3).

They also discussed the responses they had received from Tom's references. Tom recalls one of the responses the Praesidium received and his reaction to it.

One of my friends wrote a letter which was expressing great doubts about my stability and readiness to jump into another church situation. And, basically what he was going on was when I went to Indonesia, when I was still in college [eighteen years ago]. I came back from Indonesia and became an agnostic and was that for a few years. But now he says, "Look at the parallel. He goes to Hong Kong and he comes back a Lutheran."

Carl Gurgel asked, "What do you say about this letter?" All I could say was that on the first occasion I came back an agnostic. My faith was shattered. There was no faith left. (This by the way is one thing that made it more possible for me to believe that a person could lose his salvation, because now I'm seeing that that's exactly what happened.)

But...on this second occasion I come back and my faith is stronger than ever. I believe the Scripture is inerrant also in what it says about Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

So I just said, "You can't compare these two situations. The first time I felt great freedom when I thought, 'Well, I'm not going to be a pastor. I'm not going to be a missionary.' Now I'm going to continue on being a pastor if possible."

This first formal meeting went well and the Praesidium recommended Tom for a colloquy.

The next few months Tom and Melanie went through the adult instruction course and Tom really worked through the Scriptures on the question of the millennium. Pastor Gurgel had given Tom the Revelation commentary by Dr. Siegbert Becker which Tom says helped to answer a lot of questions he had.

They describe the period as one in which they were sponges trying to soak up as much as they could. This is the period in which Tom was constantly in the Church library. Melanie says that Tom was reading from the time he got up until the time he went to bed. Tom was envisioning,

There's like a huge chasm between the Reformed Church and the Lutheran Church. I wasn't sure if I could, by just one giant leap, leap across. I just imagined that I was going to leap half way and then plummet to the bottom. This is just too much of a golden opportunity to study and possibly be ready for that long leap.

In November of 1990 Tom and Melanie completed adult instructions with Pastor Kuske and were going to be accepted into membership at St. Paul in Tomah. Tom's request for colloquy had been published the required two times in the Northwestern Lutheran (cf Addendum 4).

President Mischke appointed the Colloquium Committee, which is always comprised of the district president of the man seeking colloquy, a professor from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and one of the vice-presidents of the synod, who serves as the committee's chairman (Addendum 4). The members of this particular Colloquium Committee were District President Gurgel, Professor Balge, and Vice President Lauersdorf.

The colloquy took place at St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jefferson, Wisconsin, on November 19th. The colloquy as Tom describes it lasted about four hours and could be broken into two parts. The first two hours were spent on Tom's background, much of which comprises this paper. The remaining two hours were

spent on questions of doctrine and practice (cf. Addendum 5). Tom considered the questions pertinent and important ones, and also volunteered other insights that he wasn't asked about.

After dismissing Tom, the Colloquium Committee conferred for about twenty minutes and then called Tom back into the meeting. They told him that he had passed colloquy and then explained what they would like him to do before being eligible for a call.

In keeping with the Conference of Presidents decision of October 13, 1987, Tom was required to spend three quarters at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. This time at the Seminary was both for the benefit of Tom and the WELS. It gave Tom a chance to become more comfortable with his new Church and to ask any questions he might have. It also gave the Synod the opportunity to get to know Tom better and help him make a smooth transition into our Church's full-time representative ministry.

In keeping with the Conference of Presidents' decision of April 4, 1990, Tom would be required to receive some vicar experience while in the Milwaukee area (cf. Addendum 6).

Two weeks later when the second quarter started at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Tom was present. He stayed in the dorm during the week and commuted home to Tomah on the weekends to see Melanie and their boys.

Tom seems to have thoroughly enjoyed the time he was able to spend at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He compared his education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School to that of curriculum at WLS.

The thing about Trinity was that they've got such a wide program. There are some

people who are just there for a year or two getting a masters of arts of religion. Other people are there getting a masters in some area and then going on for their P.H.D. And, then you have these people in the middle who are going for their master of divinity and wanting to be pastors.

It's sort of like sometimes they're [the courses and professors] aiming too low. Sometimes they're aiming too high. Every once in a while they get just right, so that they're focused in on a parish pastor's educational needs.

At Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary they have the single focus. I never got that even in all this training before. For example in Christian education, careful instruction in Christian education....I had one sort of terminal course on Christian education and that was just like a shot-gun approach. It was so broad it was bound to hit everybody, but not very helpful. Whereas, this one was extremely helpful and I wish I could have absorbed more of it.

I just thought that this was very, very good study for the work I was going to be doing. I didn't feel like I was doing a lot of repetition. Like in Dogmatics, the first two semesters, they thought that this was so close to what I had received already that it would be repetition and they didn't require that. But, the Christology, the Means of Grace, the Order of Salvation, the Eschatology, all that I went through again and had to rethink a lot of areas.

On February 10, 1991, at ST. Paul in Tomah Tom conducted his first liturgy. It was the festival of Epiphany and the first time Tom had ever led worship in a robe or given common cup Communion.

On April 21st, 1991, Tom gave me a Sunday off by taking my spot in the preaching rotation. It was his first time preaching from a pulpit in a Lutheran congregation.

The Freis moved to Waukesha, Wisconsin, in June of that year

and Tom spent that summer doing his vicarship at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Waukesha, Wisconsin. This practical experience Tom considered rewarding and most beneficial. At the end of the summer, he returned to WLS for one more quarter of schooling.

It was at this time that my classmates and I were privileged to have Tom in class with us. It was interesting and educational to have a walking, talking source on Reformed theology in the room with us. It was quite evident that Tom was well-read in the Lutheran Confessions as well as other major Lutheran works. It was a blessing for us to share that time with him.

On November 20, the Lord blessed Tom and Melanie with their third child, a daughter, whom they named Kelly.

When we returned for second quarter Tom was no longer with us. He was waiting to see what would happen next. On December 3rd, Tom received a call to fill the vacancy in our synod's Hong Kong field. The Lord had taken Tom and decided to allow Tom to use the gifts he had earlier developed in Hong Kong.

Tom was installed and commissioned on January 19, 1992 at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Waukesha, Wisconsin (cf. Addendum 7). Pastor Daniel Koelpin preached the sermon. The text was Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16. The theme was "The Quest for Something Better." In the sermon Pastor Koelpin applied the text to Tom's journey from the Evangelical Free Church to his installation as a WELS missionary to Hong Kong.

When Tom and Melanie arrived in Hong Kong in February, they

were returning just six months later than if they had remained in the Free Church and returned to the States to rest and gather support! Our God had guided the Freis through this extraordinary search for the truth of Scripture and He quickly returned a missionary to a people who so desperately need to here of their Savior. Such a unique blessing to the Freis, the WELS, and the people of Hong Kong certainly leads us to praise our gracious God.

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- Zink, Robert. Correspondence. February 5, 1992.

Also see the attached informational sheets.