

The Crossings Curriculum of 1983-93—a Retrospective.

Colleagues,

Last week's retrospective into one of the full-blown courses that were once part of our Crossings daily work—from 1983-1993 – teases me into some show-and-tell of more of what we did way back then. During that decade we worked up a curriculum of 21 courses, many of them taught several times. The students who signed up were “grown-ups” from all walks of life and across the ecumenical spread. Some were retirees, most all college grads, some with post-grad degrees—now and then a parish pastor. They were all serious about theology.

During the final years of that decade Webster University, here in St. Louis, listed our courses as credit courses in their own “Religious Studies” department and Bob Bertram and I became adjunct professors at Webster. They were listed with a “500” number to indicate that they were (ahem!) upper class offerings, and thus these credits could be transferred to seminaries for those of our students who later were heading that way. And a handful did just that.

All of the courses had the same format as described last week with Course #513, with four segments unfolding through the semester.

FIRST SEGMENT was study of a specific Biblical book focused on a key text in that book. Initially (for the first 14 courses) these were key texts from the lectionary appointed for festivals within the church year. When we ran out of festivals, we glommed on to other prominent Biblical texts for the final seven courses—#515 to 521.

With the biblical reference in the course title came the theological focus for study that term. Course #501 was "Crossings from Luke: Getting God's Peace to Earth." And the explicit "Biblical source" in Luke was the lectionary Gospel for the Nativity of our Lord, Luke 2:1-20. Yes, we parsed that text according to the 6-step paradigm, and then traced those primal Lukan themes elsewhere in Luke's gospel.

SECOND SEGMENT was to examine a "sample from church history" where this Lukan theology surfaced. We chose the Franciscan movement from the middle ages. After getting to know St. Francis and his followers, we then asked: How, in the Franciscan movement, did Luke's "theology of peace on earth" succeed (or not succeed) in being crossed into the church and world of that day?

THIRD SEGMENT looked at a "sample of recent theology." In Crossings from Luke it was 20th century "Liberation Theology." After reading some of the major theologians of the movement, we asked the same question of them as we did of St. Francis. How well (or maybe not so well) did Luke's theology of peace on earth fare in the work of liberation theologians?

FOURTH SEGMENT in #501 consisted of student presentations of their research on some slice-of-life today that they tracked and then crossed with Luke's theology of peace, aided and abetted by whatever might be useful from St. Francis and the liberation theologians.

Two such essays that I remember for #501 were:

- Nuclear Deterrence and the Peace Laid in a Manger
- Peace on Earth: Bethlehem and the Belleville (IL) Police Force

Here are the catalog course descriptions for the whole curriculum.

Course 501. Crossings from Luke: Getting God's Peace to Our Earth.

[Luke 2:1-20. Gospel for the Nativity of our Lord]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Gospel of Luke) Messianic peace supplants fear and poverty; how later in that same tradition (the Franciscan movement in the Middle Ages, today's Liberation Theologies) oppressor and oppressed are reunited; how the same peace "crosses" over into the most unreconciled sectors of contemporary life.

Course 502. Crossings from Isaiah: The Birthpangs of Justice.

[Isaiah 43:1-7. OT reading for the Baptism of Jesus]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Prophet Isaiah) the pain of God gives birth to justice; how the suffering servant justifies both victims and villains (in the theology of the council of Nicea, today's theology of the cross); how that same costly justice "crosses" over into realms of injustice in contemporary life.

Student Presentations:

- Faux Pas at Bhopal: The Union Carbide Disaster and God's Suffering Servant
- Messianic Justice and the Missouri State Penal System – Mary Russell

Course 503. Crossings from II Corinthians: Righting History's

Wrongs.

[II Corinthians 5:11 – 6:2. Ash Wednesday]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Second Letter to the Corinthians) the wrongs of human history are rectified in Christ's atonement; how later in that same tradition (the theologies of Anselm and Abelard, today's Process Theology) the righteousness of God outdistances wrong-doing; how the transaction of the Cross works to make right what is wrong in contemporary life.

Student Presentations:

- Violence and Reconciliation: A Battered Wife's New Creation
- Who am I? An Adoptee's Search for Roots and Reconciliation

Course 504. Crossings from John: New Birth and New Priorities.
[John 1:1-18. Second Sunday after Christmas]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Gospel of John) confused priorities are re-ordered by the Word becoming flesh; how later in that same tradition (the Lutheran Reformation, today's neo-orthodoxy movement) God's glory in the flesh re-prioritizes human options; how the same rebirth of persons and options "crosses" over into the confused priorities of contemporary life.

Student Presentations:

- Rearranging Priorities after the Heart Attack
- Can a Soldier be Saved? Priority Pressures in Today's Military – [by USAF Lt. Col.]

Course 505. Crossings from Matthew: Relocating Authority.
[Matthew 2:1-12. Epiphany of our Lord]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Gospel of Matthew) authority foundations are rearranged by the Messianic kingdom; how later in that same tradition (Augustine, the crisis at Canossa, the Kirchenkampf during the Third Reich) authority confusion gets sorted out by the authority of the crucified; how that same authority “crosses” over into the most contrary authority structures of contemporary life.

Student Presentations:

- Relocating Authority in Today’s Roman Catholic Church
- Servant Authority in a Supervisory Role

Course 506. Crossings from Psalms: What Makes the Rejects Sing?
[Psalm 118:1-2, 15-24. Psalm for Easter Sunday]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Book of Psalms) the experience of rejection turns to joy; how later in that same tradition (the Wesleyan movement, today’s black and feminist theologies) the rejects, excluded by the establishment, find a new song; how that new song “crosses” over into the most despairing sectors of contemporary life.

Student Presentations:

- Rehabilitating Rejects: The Children of Divorce
- The Christian Sanctuary Movement: Futures for Those with Futures Foreclosed

Course 507. Crossings from Ephesians: Hope Needs Success.

[Ephesians 1:16-23. Ascension of our Lord]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Letter to the Ephesians) human hopes are regrounded in the success of the resurrected Jesus; how later in that same tradition (Kierkegaard, today's theologies of hope) hope grows in otherwise hopeless situations; how the same hope "crosses" over for success in the face of despair occasioned by contemporary life.

Student Presentations:

- Success for the Hopeless: Ephesians and Adolescent Suicide
 - Therapy and Absolution in an Alcoholic Family
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Course 508. Crossings from Philippians: Winning by Losing.
[Philippians 2:1-11. Passion Sunday]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Letter to the Philippians) the divine Loser wins; how later in that same tradition (the theology of Irenaeus in the second century, Tillich and Niebuhr in the twentieth) that strange economy of winning by losing recapitalizes all sorts of losers; how that winsome economy still "crosses" over into the world of the loser in contemporary life.

Student Presentations:

- Winning by Losing: a Vocational Case Study
 - Gains and Losses in the ICU: Hi-tech Medicine and the Last Enemy
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Course 509. Crossings from Hebrews: How Sympathizers Survive.
[Hebrews 4:14-5:10. Good Friday]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Letter to the Hebrews) the divine co-suffering of the priestly Jesus bestows survival on suffering humanity; how later in that same tradition (John Calvin, the Council of Trent, today's ecumenical theology) that priesthood extends through ministry and sacraments; how that same mediatorial suffering "crosses" over for human survival in the pathos and pathology of contemporary life.

Student Presentations:

- The Priesthood of Psychiatry in Today's Conflict about Healing
- Suffering and Survival: Christ in the Midst of the Farm Crisis

Course 510. Crossings from Acts: Hearing the Healing.
[Acts 2:1-21. Pentecost]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Book of Acts) divine healing comes through such lowly acoustical means as speaking and hearing; how later in that same tradition (16th Century Jesuits in China, today's inter-religious dialogue) the well-chosen name or words can be so universal as to heal the conflicts between diverse ethnic and language groups; how the same healing or holiing language "crosses" over into the most alien sectors of contemporary life.

Student Presentations:

- Healing the Language of the Liturgy: The Case for Inclusiveness
- Hearing the Healing Despite the Block of Neurosis

Course 511. Crossings from First Peter: Unshaming the Suffering.
[1 Peter 4:12-19. Holy Innocents, Martyrs]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the First Letter of Peter) suffering loses its stigma under a glorious Name; how later in that same tradition (the “Age of the Martyrs,” in recent theologies of “confessing”) suffering is dignified by the One it resembles; how the same dignity “crosses” over into the lives of suffering and ignominy today.

Student Presentations:

- Unshaming the Suffering of Spouse-Abuse
- Unshaming the Suffering Environment: The Gospel and Ecology

Course 512. Crossings from I Corinthians: Saving Human Culture by the Cross.

[1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Holy Cross Day]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the First Letter to the Corinthians) the Cross of Christ critiques human culture in order to save it; how later in that same tradition (the culture-theologians Origen and Chrysostom, their counterparts in the 20th century) the cross serves to save subsequent human achievements; how that same cross saves amidst the manifold salvation projects underway in contemporary technological societies.

Student Presentations:

- A Technology for Witness in a High-Tech World

Course 513. Crossings from Revelation: Surviving the Apocalypse
[Revelation 12:7-12. St. Michael and All Angels]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case, the Book of Revelation) cosmic calamity and crisis exempts no one, yet survival is open to everyone via the pre-emptive apocalypse of Cosmic Christ; how later in that same tradition (Medieval mystics, 20th Century Apocalyptic artists) survival is celebrated in the very face of catastrophe; how the same Cosmic Christ copes with our apocalypse now.

Student Presentations:

- Redeeming American Pop Culture from Demonic Possession
- Crossing Salman Rushdie's Demonic Verses with Apocalyptic Good News

Course 514. Crossings from Romans: Faith Has What it Takes
[Romans 3:19-24. Festival of the Reformation]

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case the Letter to the Romans) faith first receives, then uses the power of God for salvation; how later in that same tradition (the Reformation era, today's ecumenical dialogues) faith's power is celebrated in the face of constant challenges to its validity; how the same faith works to empower people today to live in the face of monumental odds to the contrary.

No record of Student Presentations available.

[From here on we moved outside the lectionary for the texts we used as Biblical groundings.]

Course 515 Crossings from Favored Texts of the Reformers

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case the Psalms, John and Romans) the Gospel of justification by faith as God's cruciform promise elicits trust, and from that trust generates new life; how later in that same tradition (16th century church history, today's attempts for fresh articulation of the Gospel) God's promise holds true in the face of "other" promises, how the same promise works faith and life today in a world awash in a sea of promises.

Student Presentations:

- Justification and Just Wars: Operation Desert Storm
- The Justification of Sonya in Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment
- New Age Religion: How Good is its Good News?

Course 516. Crossings from II Corinthians: Holy Spirit, Healing Spirit, and Human Holiness

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case II Corinthians 3-5) the Holying Spirit restores human life to holiness by extending Christ's work of salvation; how later in that same tradition (Hispanic spirituality, today's feminist spirituality) this same Spirit of Christ resurrects humankind from the most dismal dilemmas into lives of spirit and truth, how the Holy Gust (sic!) continues revivifying the winded today.

Student Presentations:

- Spirituality in the Indiana Jones Movie Trilogy & Corinthian Spirituality
- The "Twelve Step" Spirituality of AA and God the Healing Spirit :

Course 517. Crossings from Galatians: Jesus means Freedom

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case the Letter to the Galatians) faith in the Gospel brings with it freedom, freedom in the place we least expect it, freedom vis-a-vis God; how later in that same tradition (today's Black Theology and our planet's own freedom as discussed at the Rio Earth Summit) that freedom undermines creation's bondage in the most surprising places.

Student Presentations:

- Christ's Healing Freedom from the Bondage of Child-Abuse
- Christian Freedom in the Pyramid of Corporate Management Structures

Course 518. Crossings from Mark: How Nobodies Become Somebodies

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case the Gospel of Mark) nobodies (lepers, outcasts, sinners of all sorts) become somebodies when they encounter Jesus and his own God-forsaken nobodiness on the cross, how later in that same tradition (Father Damian's ministry to lepers and Sojourner Truth's bold witness and Palestinian Liberation Theology) nobody-ness is trumped by Christ as his disciples turn people of no value into God's own children, how that same transformation happens today.

Student Presentation:

- "You've Picked the Right One, Baby:" A Crucified Lord for the Pepsi Generation

Course 519. Crossings from Genesis: From Old Creation to New Creation

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case the first three chapters of Genesis) God's creation, initially very good, but now groaning, longs for the renewal that came in Christ; how later in that same tradition (the First Article of the ecumenical creeds, today's ecological theology) creation's redemption is enacted, how Christ's merciful lordship renews creation in our day.

Student Presentation:

- Symphony of the New Creation—Care & Redemption of All that God has Made

Course 520. Crossings from the Acts of the Apostles: The Gospel in Dialogue with World Religions

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case the mission sermons in the Book of Acts) the Good News of Christ moved across boundaries with its mercy-offer of something genuinely "good" and genuinely "new," how later in that same tradition (subsequent mission history, today's Christian-Buddhist dialogue) that Gospel continues to move onward, how that Gospel is moving today into the most surprising new places generating Christian communities of faith and love.

No record available of Student Presentations in this course.

Course 521. Crossings from the Psalms: Sin, Suffering and Survival.

A study of how in the Biblical Tradition (in this case the 7 Penitential Psalms) God's mercy meets humans in their sin and their suffering and brings healing, how later in that same tradition (Paul Gerhardt's hymnody during the 30 Years War, Christians involved in today's high-tech health care) divine mercy opens doors for sufferers' survival, how Christ continues healing sinner-sufferers in the ministry of "little Christs" today.

No record available of Student Presentations in this course.

So much for the archival record.

One more item. We thought about it then, and now the thought returns: What if theological seminaries took this format for their educational programs, what sort of parish pastors might that create? Deep down that really was our dream. D.v., I may just ruminate on that some more next week. If you have some thoughts on the topic, send them in.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. This coming Sunday, March 27 marks the 90th return of Bob Bertram's birthday. He died 8 years ago just two weeks before his 82nd. In the year 1921, March 27 was also a Sunday. It was Easter.