



C is for Christ,

the Death of Death our Foe

There is someone we wanted you all to hear from: Pastor Stephen Krueger, a hospice chaplain in Tampa, Florida. Steve's personal story shared here is moving and profound, not only emotionally but theologically. He is suffering from cancer, but also living with Christ the Healer, whose presence he represents to his "flock" at LifePath Hospice and Palliative Care. Steve conveys his hope beyond despair as a "wounded healer" (to borrow a phrase from Nouwen), not only in these pages, but in his further work of indexing the Crossings' library. Leaves may fall from the trees in this season of autumn, but Steve, the Christ-truster, will never be far from the root of Promise. Thanks for writing for us!

mhoy

Mike Hoy's kind invitation to contribute to the Fall/Michaelmas Crossings newsletter intersects at a time of life where crossings of many kinds seem to be in order. For me, while writing during a hot, Florida July, it feels like a brittle, wintry theme I'm taking up instead: the theme of death and dying.

Just to help the reader, a quick biographical sketch of me. Trained in the old LCMS system, which included prep school, a senior college, and then a route to ministry that was to have been highly scripted through Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, I am among those blessed hundreds to have had that interrupted cross-wise, by exile (1973-74 was my internship/vicarage year). Book of Concord theology suddenly took on new life as Promising Tradition theology was learned now with the exciting cadences of

"the Augsburg Aha!" A hermeneutical approach to doing theology, a dialectic between God's two words of law and promise, made my LCMS world of upper Midwestern-styled brand of Orthodoxy come together in a whole new, living way and I was forever hooked on Crossings. Suddenly Christ no longer lay buried in the tomb!

Thus, without belaboring, my own vocational tasks included 30 years of parish pastoring, mostly in the North American urban setting, which evolved into hospice chaplaincy in Florida and enabled spouse and me to care for an Alzheimer's father-in-law, while also juggling the wonderful role of doting grandparents three times over.

Yet, comes now that one more thing for me: a three-year-old battle with cancer, that sneaky disease that strikes and costs dearly. For me, it has meant the removal of my larynx and a large part of my trachea and the now-daily trips to the oncologist for radiation and chemotherapy in a current last-ditch effort to stave off the malignancy's stage-four invasion.

The hospice chaplain is being taken to school all over again and it's good to notice how people quietly watch how you take your own theological medicine. People are forever interested in how good our gospel really is when it's put to the test of applying to ourselves.

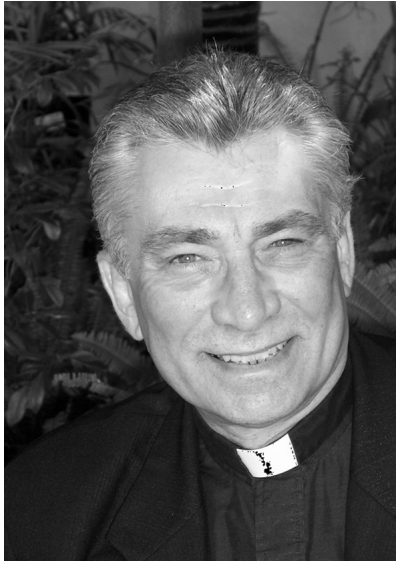
This newsletter piece is intended to be a brief reflection about what happens in that quiet, private place you go for thinking, meditating and prayer to make sense out of living and dying. I hope you don't mind. Fr. Henri Nouwen used to say that those things which are the most personal are usually those things that are the most universal. I think he is right about that.

R is for Rising

with Christ through Baptism

Baptism=Living and Dying and Rising with Christ, Our Life, Death's Death

The place I keep learning to go ought to be no surprise even though it surprises daily anyway. For confessors whose lives were first led by water and God's Holying Spirit, baptism is that place's name. Among the dozens of things you can say about the pristine promise of the sacrament, the Apostle Paul lists death (of all things!) among the top reasons why baptism is that hallowed space to go for the twin joys of hopeful comfort and for all the benefits Christ has come to bring. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6: 3).



Baptized Steve Krueger

How strange that claim once seemed. Baptisms are for beginning lives, not ending them. That is, of course, until death begins to make its way into your own growing consciousness and claims you to make sense of it.

The young Martin Luther made sense of his very real consciousness of death by reading Paul's words from Romans 6 and concluding the Apostle here was talking about two kinds of deaths: the "temporal" (or we might say, "little") one and the "eternal" (or we might say, "big") one we already get in on through our baptism into Christ (*LW* 25, 310).

In his Romans commentary (the young Reformer's lectures on Romans 3:5 - 8:39 appear to come from winter 1515-1516), Luther explicates how our baptismal death with Christ is the mortal, huge death we face because in it "death perishes totally into eternal nothingness, and nothing will ever return from this death..." (p. 310). God, having drowned us in the blessed water bath with Christ, then pulls us out of that blessed water for our brand new life with the risen Christ, ready to face now the littler, temporal

death with death's defeat secured through the promise of the resurrection. Baptismally dealing with the big death gets the sting of the littler one out of the way.

Luther later refines the idea further in his familiar drowned Old Adam/Risen-with-Christ New Person baptismal image found in his Small and Large Catechisms, but the mighty big death of baptism has come to me now to mean everything (would that I might have been more attentive all along!). Elsewhere, Luther notices how baptism's promise daily includes putting our sins to death through Christ's cruciformed pardoning (*The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism of 1519*) and how the promise of baptism is good enough to stand up even to God's own wrath which my sin incurs (by Godself becoming me the sinner under wrath, see Luther's Commentary on Psalm 90, *LW* 13, 75-141, for starters). Good thing that baptism involves no less than a death and the mega-christology surrounding that death!

O is for Old (Adam); back to the dust

Baptism=A Water Bath That Awakens from Deadly Slumber

To lay hold of baptism's claims and promises as a way to deal with your dying is to entrust yourself to a bold, feisty faith which has to be believed against a host of counter-claims, counter-gospels and counter-promises which surround us daily. As I go about my daily routine as a cancer patient, the littler death has become the preoccupying feature and the really big death is too easily, quickly and readily set aside by a world which echoes that ancient lie: "God knows you will not die" (Genesis 3:4). The Deceiver beguiles once again about how your eyes will be opened and you will be "like God..."

When I was a hospice chaplain, I noticed even hospice workers would most often not be able to admit to the "d"-word. People would want to talk about the "final transition" with me when one "passes" or

“passes away” or “is now sustaining a life-limiting illness” (a hospice favorite) but nobody is permitted to die.

Some years back Ernest Becker wrote his Pulitzer prize winning **The Denial of Death** (1974) to describe the hidden power that has ensnared our western culture. That the study was Becker’s challenge to the power of repressed sexuality described by Freud, something most still believe, meant that Becker’s *magnum opus* remained largely an unopened book for many who might have been wondering about death. Yet, while fully from the secular side, the volume says much the same thing as Ed Schroeder did in his 1972 **Encountering the Last Enemy** [posted in Crossings web library]. Ed’s essay noted Helmut Thielicke picking up on how original sinners try to dodge responsibility for their dying by affixing their meaning or justification on noble projects or ideas beyond themselves which outlive them (which is what Becker also says). That way they

don’t really die. But the problem is we do. “You are Adam, man from the dust, it’s back to the dust you must go.” That haunting sentence does not get wished away.

In my baptism I am reminded that it does get defeated.

My youngest granddaughter is an Orthodox Christian where the tactile sensations of the water bath at baptism really come into play. That baby really gets wet, as if, there’ll be no slumbering through this grand celebration and the Name of this child’s God is put on her so grandly: the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! In the sacrament the community is really reminded about drownings and risings, about deaths and resurrections.

S-S is for *So, Sacramentally,*
we do not lose heart

Baptism=Pulling Off Easter Along the Lenten Way

One of the treats I remember from my seminary days was Ed and Marie Schroeder’s gift to be able to pull out a carefully crafted hymn, fit for the right occasion. It is a trick, I’ll bet, they learned from Luther. Nonetheless, from them I learned it’s okay to reassign great songs of faith from one purpose to another. In my case, the Lenten cycle hymn, *Christ, the Life of All the Living* (LBW 97) has become my favorite baptismal hymn. The next line tells why: *Christ, the death of death, our foe*. I, too, now have come to need one of those, the very thing I have proclaimed for everyone else: a Lord of the living and of the dead (Romans 14: 7-8) in whom death’s forever defeated.

It is my faith I use now to reassure those around me that it’s okay to die if that is what God has planned for me right now, reassurance that my own still-living parents need and want to hear about (the hardest thing, I know, is the death of your child...just ask another Heavenly Father!). When mother and father say to me, “I wish it could be we, instead, for you” (as loving parents would), I get to say to them: “You feel so powerless, do you? Well, you did everything a Christian parent could do for me when you brought me to the baptismal font of Grace Lutheran Church,

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River Forest, Illinois in 1949 and death's defeat was sacramentally proclaimed to me as Another's death became mine, and mine, his. When you, mother and father, brought me to God's baptismal washing, you did everything."

No wonder Luther was so struck by his own baptism that he knew where to go when his own fears and doubts assailed him. *Baptizatus sum*, he would say (But still in it all... "I am baptized"). Baptism is for knowing whose you are because you have shared a death, and, thus, a resurrection. To Martin Luther, **baptism is for putting daily to use** what we confess as God's pulling off Easter while we walk life's Lenten time still. Or, as St. Paul would have it:

So, we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot... (2 Corinthians 3:16-18).

May God grant each of you a baptismal place this fall for all your crossings between faith and life.

*Steve Krueger
Sun City Center, FL*

I-N-G-S is for *Interview* (on) *Newer Grassroot Strategies* – a conversation with *Francisco Claver*

On June 3, 2009, at the home of missionaries Ed and Marie Schroeder, several of us Crossings-folk were invited to meet with Bishop Francisco F. Claver, S.J.. The date itself was significant, marking the twentieth anniversary of Tiananmen Square. Bishop Claver, and many others of us familiar with Philippine history, remember how these people also stopped tanks in the streets of EDSA (*Epifanio de los Santos Avenue* = Manifestation of the Saints Avenue) in March of 1986.

Claver was in St. Louis to speak with fellow Jesuits at a time and on a theme coinciding with his recent monograph, **The Making of A Local Church** (Orbis Books, 2008). This book "is all about the efforts of bringing about a Vatican II church through the pas-



Bishop Francisco Claver flanked by Ed Schroeder (left) and Crossings President Steve Kuhl (right) while visiting St. Louis this past June.

toral work not only of bishops but of all priests, religious and laity who try in their own ways, little and big, to make the Gospel come alive in the communities in which they live and with whose members they interact daily as Christians and as ordinary human beings" (p.3).

Claver provided us with a rich historical and cultural perspective of what has transpired in the Philippines over several decades. He spoke of the several natural disasters in the Philippines (typhoons, tsunamis) that have contributed to the chronic poverty of the region. There is "constant rebuilding." Philippine homes are often poorly constructed, but "swing with the wind of the typhoon."

With artistic flair, Claver conveyed how the winds of weather parallel the winds of political change in Philippine culture. The Philippines had first been colonized by the Spanish in the early 1800's, where conquest and coercion were strongly pronounced (Claver noted it as a time when "priests-and-soldiers" came together). Later American interests and expansion in the region helped to shape the value in the principles of democracy; but as the 1904 World's Fair which placed the Igorots [mountain tribal people from Luzon Island] on display, even this colonization was not without its exploitation. Finally, there was the influence of Japanese colonization and then Chinese migrants who moved in before World War II.

The Philippines reflect a syncretization of the culture and traditions of all of these. Religiously, eighty percent of the country is Catholic, ten percent is Protestant, and four percent is Muslim, leaving about six

percent for various other religious expressions. But it is also a country that has been destroyed more than once by wars and persecutions.

In the midst of all of this, the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) gather to talk about the gospel and to pray. These grassroots experiences, principled on Vatican II, emphasized participation and responsibility for social change. The BEC's focused on the local problems of corruption in the villages, but with an eye to the larger corruptions that needed responsible change. Recognizing the values of their own faith, and being aware of critical social analysis, the BEC's arrived at decisions for transforming their culture toward a more hopeful direction.

Claver refers to himself as a cultural anthropologist; but there are clearly theological underpinnings in his approach. Steven Kuhl, Crossings President, who wrote a thoughtful review of Claver's book for Thursday Theology some months ago, and who was also present at the gathering, suggested to Claver some other theological underpinnings that Claver may not have been as aware of before this night.

Kuhl, borrowing from the insights of the Frankfurt School, suggested that maybe a more critical understanding of culture is in order. In this school of thought, critical questioning of the culture implies also a more critical reflection about the very ones who are seeking to transform the culture. They, the critics, are themselves critiqued.

Kuhl would go further to speak of how Christian faith, in fact, frees one for the act of penance. In a "culture of complaint" where all the people can do is seek to criticize the culture into something better than it is for the presumed work of justice, the gospel brings the criticism much closer to home and heart. Rather than complaining about the way life is, we get to embrace deep and profound renewal through the gospel that leads to complete transformation. It is not only the sin of oppressive forces in a culture, but also the sin within us all, that gets to be addressed through our trust in the cross of Christ. Claver expressed a keen interest and desire to know more about this theological hermeneutic of culture, what we in the Crossings community call the promising tradition of law and gospel.

We were all touched by Claver's personal, even humble, story of how he was a key participant in the winds of change in the Philippines. As a Philippine bishop himself, he had the principal hand in shaping the strong statement of the Philippine episcopacy which gave the grassroots people the liberating courage to challenge the forces of oppression in their country. Millions of people came to protest in what became known as "the miracle of EDSA."

Why "miracle"? Claver said the miracle was not only that so many showed up to protest, but that of all these millions all of them were needing to be fed and cared for – "and they were." It evokes visions of Christ feeding the multitudes, feeding bodies and souls with hope and promise.

The winds of promise are alive and well in the Philippines, and for us all!

m h o y



Giving Thanks for Armencius Munthe

Feb. 12, 1934 - July 25, 2009

*Of all those who attended our last Crossings conference, none was more enthusiastic or friendly than Armencius. He had come all the way from Medan, Indonesia to be with us, and you could just **see** how delighted he was to share his ministry with us. Even though he had retired as Bishop of one of the Batak Lutheran Churches in Indonesia, he continued to teach and preach. Recently, he learned our Crossings six-step method and enthusiastically taught it to as many students as he could—sometimes reaching 500 young pastors at a time.*

You can read some of his correspondence with Ed and Ed's eulogy, in our Thursday Theology archives, <http://www.crossings.org/thursday/2009/thur073009.shtml>. We mourn his death, but rejoice in the hope of the Resurrection.

Printing and mailing this quarterly is paid for by your gifts, thank you. If you are a reader but not yet a giver, we can wait. When you are ready to be both, we won't object.

A Community Update— and a Request

Sometimes, like now, I simply **love** working for Crossings. Not just because Crossings taught me the really, really **good** Gospel that makes me want to dance for joy, and not just because I therefore care passionately about sharing this fabulous Law/Gospel theology. True, that's a huge part of it, but today I'm thinking how much I love Crossings because we really **are** what our name says we are: a **community**. Officially, we are "The Crossings Community." I'm learning that's not just a title. It's a description. It takes **all** of us, not just a handful, to get Crossings work done. And guess what? It's happening! Whenever there's a need, it seems someone with just the right gifts appears. Let me give you some examples....

*Example 1: A year ago at our board meeting, Jerry Burce was musing how helpful it would be to have a new translation of Werner Elert's book, **The Christian Faith**. So we asked Robert Schultz, knowing that Bob had studied under Elert, if we could commission him to do exactly that. Bob not only said "yes," — he was delighted to do it and declined any remuneration (we'll see about that). He has been hard at work translating and just finished the Prologue and several early chapters. Stay tuned.....As soon as Bob has a section polished, we intend to post those chapters on our web site. This gave us the idea to offer a discussion of Elert as one of our pre-conference options in January.*

*Example 2: Another item we mulled over was the under-utilization of our web library — namely, the published works of Robert Bertram and Edward Schroeder. They are a great treasure! But how to make them more accessible? Enter Steve Krueger, author of the main article in this newsletter. He answered our request: (1) To write abstracts for each article, and (2) To catalog and categorize the articles. Do you know what a **huge** job this is? But Steve too takes it on gladly and, can you believe, thankfully! Twenty abstracts are already done and posted. More are in the pipeline. What a tremendous gift Steve has been to us!*

*Example 3: At this year's board meeting, we pondered the important challenge ahead of us of reaching the next generation. One practical possibility we tossed around was using Facebook. But how, or rather, who, would do that? Well, can you believe it, not even five days later (out of the clear blue sky!?) we received an email from Peter Keyel offering (yes, **offering!**) to put Crossings on Facebook, saying, "Crossings needs to be on Facebook.....I'll do it for you." We accepted, and not even 24 hours later, it was done. So, if any of you use Facebook, please link to us (The Crossings Community), and more importantly, suggest us to your friends.*

*Example 4: I am overwhelmed and heartened by the positive responses we received when we asked people to be speakers at our January conference. They just seem **glad** we ask, and so supportive! As a result, our lineup is awesome: Fred Niedner, Marcus Lohrmann, and Robert Kolb are coming back. Art Simon, founder of Bread for the World, is coming. William Burrows, the past-president of the American Society of Missiology, will be a keynoter. Fred Danker, Richard Gahl, Carol Braun and Jukka Kaariainen [see brochure for bios] will be new speakers. And of course, our own special "regulars," Ed Schroeder, Jerry Burce, Steve Albertin, Marcus Felde, Lori Cornell. Such a treat! Such an extravaganza!*

*Now comes my plea. We realize there is so much more we could be doing to carry out our mission of promoting law/gospel theology. For example, we would like to commission Ed Schroeder and Jerome Burce to write books. We would like to publish a Crossings "primer." We need more Sabbathology writers to tackle the Old Testament pericopes. We would like to create a Crossings bible study that is downloadable for use in congregations. We would like to add an audio/visual section on our web. We don't lack expertise as much as we lack resources to remunerate individuals. But isn't this where the rest of the community can help? Would **you** be willing to "up" your donations to turn these dreams into reality? Or, would you like to work on one of these projects?*

*Finally, my last plea is that you keep the community vibrant in a special way. Attend the conference in January. [See the enclosed brochure for details]. We **want** to get to know and learn from each other. Simply put, we **need** each other! After all, we're a community, the **Crossings Community**.*

Peace and Joy,
Cathy Lessmann