

#745 Ed Schroeder Reports from Toronto

Colleagues,

In the early '80s, as Crossings co-founder Ed Schroeder was stepping away from the disintegrating remnants of Christ Seminary–Seminex, he somehow got bitten by the mission bug. There followed for him and his wife Marie a second career, grossly underpaid, as a globe-trotting teacher of Lutheran theology and a steady contributor to ecumenical conversation about the mission of the Gospel. The latter interest has taken Ed , with Marie, to any number of conferences and assemblies of mission specialists and scholars, almost all of which he told us about at length during his twelve years as editor and chief writer of Thursday Theology. I'd guess that for many of us these reports have been our only connection to the arena of scholarly missiology.

If this be so, then we bring you a treat this week. Ed and Marie were recently in Toronto for the 13th Quadrennial Assembly of the [International Association for Mission Studies](#) (IAMS). You'll see them (for the time being at least) in the photo that pops up when you click on the hyperlink—lower right corner, Marie in red, one person away from the edge, and Ed directly behind her. Last week Ed sent us a report of what he heard and saw there. That he did so is a pretty good indicator of how enmeshed he continues to be in that ongoing conversation. After all, he had told us earlier not to expect him to reengage with Thursday Theology until Martin Luther's November birthday. Some things, obviously, are too important to wait—and for that we're glad. You'll be too.

So here without further ado is Ed's newest and latest, as ever

respectful though also critical of what he heard, the aim being that Christ should get the glory and sinners the comfort that God seeks to give. Enjoy.

Jerry Burce, for the editorial team.

Colleagues,

IAMS 13. Afterwards Some After-Words.

[Not all of them triggered by Daniel Carroll Rodas' whimsical comment as he began his second Bible Study with us—and both were super! —on Saturday: “I’m a bit nervous with this presentation since I understand there are some Lutherans here.”]

1. The Good News itself was margined, I think, in our time together in Toronto focusing on “Migration, Human Dislocation, and the Good News. Margins as the Center in Christian Mission.” Had we dug more explicitly into THE Good News itself—especially as it is articulated in I Peter and in the Letter to the Hebrews (the “great cloud of witnesses” section)—we would have benefited. We’d have heard that the margins are the center, not just for Christian Mission, but the center of Christian existence itself. When these texts speak of alien/exile/stranger, they are theological terms, not sociological ones. The key NT term for that is “parepidemos.” For that term the standard NT Greek-English lexicon BDAG says “Christians who are not at home in this world.”
2. Possibly this margination, as I call it, comes because we more or less all suppose, “Well, all of us know what The Good News is, so that term doesn’t need any explicit attention in the program.” But, of course, it always does. I remember my first-year seminary teacher (homiletics)

telling us, "If you think that you can presuppose the Gospel to be already present in the hearts and minds of your congregation when you are preaching a sermon, then that sermon will be a Gospel-less sermon."

3. Dan's Bible studies were marvelous and eye-opening. But Bible and Gospel are not synonyms. And when the explicit texts we studied were from the laws of the OT, then all the more "the Gospel needs to be added." [That's a mantra from Luther's colleague Melanchthon when he was teaching his students about preaching Christian sermons on law-texts from the Bible.]
4. NT references did surface, of course, throughout Dan's presentations—and also in the presentations from the keynoters. Most often as corroboration of what Dan was presenting from "Moses" in the Hebrew scriptures, sometimes from explicit "Gospel" references in the NT But...
5. But we never took time to get a "Gospel-grounding" for a mission theology to folks at the margins. And there is a difference.
6. As St. John reminds his readers already in his prologue: The law was given by Moses, Grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ. Mission theology grounded on the former will not be the same as mission theology grounded on the latter. Or, best of all, grounded on both—God's Law and God's Gospel—properly distinguished and then properly linked to each other.
7. A "different" mission theology, different from Moses (and from Moses-repeated in the NT), a mission theology with Gospel-grounding surfaces regularly in the NT Most explicitly, it seems to me, in I Peter and the "great cloud of witnesses" section in the Letter to the Hebrews, the only two places in the NT where the term "parepidemos" occurs.
8. But also in the four NT Gospels. Take the Luke 10 parable

that Daniel brought to our attention, the Good Samaritan. Dan startled some of us by showing us the “switch” that Jesus does with the word “neighbor” at the parable’s end. Namely, that the “neighbor” to be loved was not the victim half-dead in the ditch, but the Samaritan, the outsider whom Judeans were not inclined to love at all. That much—a surprise to some of us—is still Moses. Love thy neighbor. Seems to me that Luke’s real punch line at the end of the parable is a switch on the “lawyer’s” initial question. If you will, a switch from Law to Gospel, to the Good News.

9. Like this. The lawyer has been grounding his life on the law, as he reveals by his very opening question to Jesus. Therefore he asks the Law-question of Jesus: “What must I do...” In Luke’s overall theology what he needs to do “to inherit eternal life” is this: “Repent (from living a law-grounded life) and believe the Good News (Jesus standing right in front of him).” So the parable is about him. The law (priest and Levite in the parable) are unable to help him, even worse, they leave him half-dead in the ditch. He needs Jesus, THE Good Samaritan (par excellence) to rescue him from his ditch, bring him to some “inn” where with continuing care (from the outsider “Samaritan” Jesus!) he will find life again. This Jesus is not only the “neighbor” whom he ought to love (and trust), but in clinging to Jesus he would thereby also be fulfilling the “first and great commandment” about which he apparently (blindly) thinks he has no problems. [Yes, that is Luther’s exegesis of this text, Dan.]
10. Now to I Peter and Hebrews. THE fundamental notion of alien/exile in these two texts is that when you trust Christ you BECOME an alien/exile in the very homeland you’ve grown up in—even if you never leave your birthplace, never are pushed to the margins—sociological, political or economic—of your native habitat. Trusting the

gospel makes you an alien in your own homeland.

11. So the message of I Peter/Hebrews is how to BE a Christ-trusting alien/exile wherever on the planet you happen to be living. In our discussions in Toronto the “alien/exile” was almost always some “other,” not we ourselves. We were working on “being Biblical” in our response to such “others.” The alien/exile was the grammatical object of our sentences. The texts of Hebrews/Peter present aliens/exiles as the subjects of the sentences. We Christians, ALL Christians, are the aliens/exiles. How might our work on the Conference theme have unfolded, had we started from there?
12. Being a Christ-trusting alien/exile is not the exception to “normal” Christian faith-life, but the standard, the constant. Being an alien/exile in whatever culture surrounds you is the norm (=what’s normal) for Christian existence. To slip out of that Christian “normal” into some non-alien/non-exile way of life is to slip away from Christ. It’s that serious. [The concept of an “established church” in any culture is an oxymoron according to I Peter/Hebrews.]
13. Fundamental to Christian exilic/alien existence is the new God-relationship bestowed by Christ to those who trust him. That new God-relationship makes them citizens of a new world (gives them a new passport, a second passport with new identity and new homeland-connections!) and at the same time turns them into aliens/exiles in their former homeland where their “old” passport identified them. They are no longer “at home” in their homeland.
14. The message in I Peter and Hebrews is addressed to Christ-trusters who are growing weary of being aliens/exiles in their own homelands. Burnout, you might say. And for whom among us today is that unknown?
15. And at the root of it, say these NT texts, as is always

the case when faith flags, is the faltering Christ-connection of the Christian exile/alien. So they—and we too—need the Christ-connection rejuvenated.

16. So both of these NT books devote their initial chapters to remedying just that: the Christ-faith-burnout. As my ancient homiletics prof said: They preach the Gospel to already (well mostly) believing Christians. And then spell out for them a Gospel-grounding for how to live their Christ-trusting alien/exile existence in what is otherwise (but then again is not) their homeland.
17. That counsel—"parakleesis" in Greek—focuses on their daily life in the context of two audiences. One is their fellowship with other Christ-trusting aliens/exiles. The other is with folks who are not (not yet) Christ-trusters, whether or not they are aliens/exiles in the social, political, economic surroundings where they live.
18. One way of portraying Christian mission with these metaphors is to say, "Gospel-proclamation intends unashamedly to turn its hearers into Christ-trusting aliens/exiles." And having done that at the outset, to "disciple" them in the manner portrayed in I Peter and Hebrews.
19. Remember that the old meaning of the Greek word for disciple (matheetes) is apprentice. "Following Jesus" amounts to a master-apprentice relationship. Granted, the Master does teach his disciples, but the teaching—like that of a master carpenter, master violinist—is not classroom-instruction, but "showing how" to practice the skill of the specific "trade."
20. In Christian discipleship the apprentice is in the "trade" of becoming a "master/meister/maestro" Christ-truster, that is, a master exile/alien. In word and deed the Master Christ models it in front of us. To "make disciples of all peoples" is to proclaim the Gospel with the result that

all peoples become apprentices of Jesus, which turns them into his kind of aliens/exiles.

21. But Christ-trusters are not exiles/aliens from a homeland to which we hope someday to return. No, it's exile in the other direction. I think it was Emma Wild-Wood who told us that we are aliens/exiles from a homeland up ahead, a homeland toward which we are moving, but have not yet arrived. Which, of course, is a direct citation from Hebrews 11:15 & 16.

Summa. What difference would such explicit Gospel input have made for our time together in Toronto? I don't know. There's an old "Pogo-quote" that circulated in the USA when I was a seminarian 60 years ago. "We have met the enemy, and he is us." I Peter/Hebrews say something similar: "We have discovered the alien/exile, and she is us." For which, "Thanks be to God."

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St. Louis, Missouri USA
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