

Crossings, Inc. (Saint Louis): A Proposal

Robert W. Bertram

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What?

To establish Crossings, Inc. – or whatever its name should be – an institute for theological transactions in people's secular callings, training clergy and laity together.

Who?

a) Fulltime students (from the USA and elsewhere) who are candidates for an advanced theological degree in the Saint Louis Theological Consortium (S.T.M., M.A., D.Min., Th.D. or Ph.D.) and who are including the Crossings curriculum as partial fulfillment of their degree requirements;

b) Fellows (clergy but also and especially laity), who while in-service engage part-time in the same Crossings curriculum with the fulltime students though only intermittently – say, two or three times a semester – and only for short segments of the semester – weekend conferences, one-day seminars – functioning not only as fellow-learners with the fulltime students but also as their guides, being experienced practitioners;

c) Consultants, hired ad hoc for seminars and conferences and representing particular areas of expertise, especially from the secular sector – e.g., non-theological disciplines in universities, the professions, corporate business, government,

popular culture, communications;

d) Faculty, consisting of half a dozen professors currently teaching at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, who could begin on the Crossings staff part-time and, if circumstances warrant, could become fulltime and could be augmented by others.

Why?

a) To develop a usable theology of people's secular callings, not merely a popular version of existing professional theologies but a new professional theology which consciously employs the people's own indigenous concerns, experience and categories, for ministry to people not only in their churchly roles but also and especially in their secular vocations;

b) To cross the communications gap which for too long has separated the church's students of theology from the church's laity, especially from the laity in their everyday lives;

c) To utilize the present crisis in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, especially as that threatens its Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, as an opportunity for new experiments in theological education – notice, not just another institution for theological education, (like a seminary-in-exile) which at the moment still seems premature, but rather a new kind of theological education which would not be in competition with any existing theological institution and which the Synod, crisis or no crisis, and many another church body as well could profit from right now, at least as an experiment;

d) To have ready, in the form of Crossings, an already functioning program of theological education which could later be re-tooled into a full-fledged seminary in the sorry event that worse comes to worst in the Synod and that a whole new

seminary should be needed after all.

Where?

a) For now, in Saint Louis, though actually any large metropolitan area could have its own version of Crossings so long as these three assets were on hand; i) an initial nucleus of sympathetic students and professors of theology, ii) a broad base of local congregations and lay leadership in the community and iii) established graduate schools of theology through whose degree programs the Crossings curriculum could be accredited;

b) If “where” means at which campus or building, then the answer is: almost anywhere, as the teaching-learning situation requires- e.g., in available classrooms and libraries on Saint Louis Theological Consortium campuses (especially for semester-long courses), in local churches (especially for congregation-based conferences), in local industrial plants, corporation headquarters, government offices, etc. (especially for one-day seminars and for doing theology “on location”.)

When?

As early as spring, 1974, in the modest form of pilot conferences and seminars, but as a program of accredited, semester-long courses, probably not before the beginning of the 1974 fall semester.

How?

a) For a start, by means of a three-track curriculum –“Grounding/Tracking/Crossing” – with each track consisting of two semester-long (fall and spring), three-credit courses and a third, month-long, two credit course during the winter interim,

as follows:

Grounding: Fall Sem., 3 cr./Interim, 2 cr./Spring Sem., 3 cr. = 8 credits

Tracking: Fall Sem., 3 cr./Interim, 2 cr./Spring Sem., 3 cr. = 8 credits

Crossing: Fall Sem., 3 cr./Interim, 2 cr./Spring Sem., 3 cr. = 8 credits

Total 24 credits

(For an elaboration of this curriculum, see Appendix A.)

b) Ideally, the fulltime student would be enrolled in all three series of courses simultaneously, with the emphasis not so much on their separateness as on their inter-relatedness and cross-pollenization;

c) Each one of the three series of courses would at certain junctures in the semester be open to fellows – the part-time, in-service participants, clergy and lay – who would share in those particular segments of the course in the form of weekend conferences and one-day seminars:

d) One example of how a student at Crossings could have his work there accredited toward a graduate degree in theology is Eden Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program, specifically its Program of Studies in the Theology for Contemporary Ministry. Eden's D. Min. degree requires thirty-eight semester hours, which include "fifteen semester hours of electives arranged in consultation with the Director of Postgraduate Studies." Now suppose that Crossings' courses would-be acceptable to Eden for transfer credit. There is already something of a precedent for such transfer. Namely, the D. Min. candidate in Eden's other program of studies, the Program of Studies in Pastoral Care, accumulates "at least ten semester hours of approved supervised clinical education" in non-Eden institutions like CARE and Counseling,

itself an independently incorporated educational agency. So what if Eden would approve study at Crossings somewhat the way it now approves study at CARE and Counseling, and would apply the credits earned at Crossings to the D. Min. Program of Studies in the Theology of Contemporary Ministry? Remembering that in that program as many as fifteen semester hours are accumulated in electives, we might propose to Eden's Director of Postgraduate Studies that at least some D. Min. candidates (for example, transfers from Concordia) be allowed to take their fifteen hours of electives at Crossings from among its Grounding/Tracking/Crossing courses. The remainder of their required credits for the D. Min. degree, these students would then acquire in other courses at Eden.

e) Perhaps similar arrangements for accrediting the Crossings courses could be negotiated through the graduate degree programs of Saint Louis University's Divinity School, which offers not only an M.A. in the four traditional theological disciplines but, in the two fields of Biblical Literature and Historical Theology, also a Ph.D. The question arises whether the same arrangement for credit-transfer might not be worked out with Concordia Seminary itself, as applicable to its S.T.M. and Th.D. programs in its School for Graduate Studies. At the moment that is a question, all right, but there is only one way to find the answer. An approach might even be made to other universities in the area like Washington University and U.M.S.L., though in these cases the prospect of transferring Crossings credit to their existing degree programs is harder to imagine.

f) At the same time that explorations are being initiated with local educational institutions, efforts should begin to reconnoiter local LC-MS congregations and their pastors to determine how much support might be anticipated from them – just moral support, let alone financial, but especially support in the form of their encouraging their own membership to

participate in Crossings as follows;

g) Immediate inquiry into sources of funding, particularly for salaried Crossings' faculty, aiding needy students (especially from overseas) and subsidizing individual conferences and seminars, is top priority. For such solicitation of funds professional help is desirable.

h) No doubt the most immediate need is for market-research into how much actual interest there is on the part of students, especially in Concordia's present student-body, for doing advanced work with Crossings. A beginning student enrollment of twenty-five would seem to be a minimum.

i) Meanwhile, dry-runs in the form of conferences and seminars might be mounted already in the next few months, incorporating some of the ingredients of Crossings' proposed curriculum.

j) Also, Crossings' prospective faculty and prospective students might begin now to explore with local LC-MS congregations ways and means of offering Crossings-type services to those congregations, part-time, perhaps in the role of called assistant pastors. These affiliations could start immediately, providing the congregations with theologically based vocational counseling. Small discussion groups of lay people, who would of course provide the vocational expertise, would dialogue about their respective callings, and the theologian-assistant could function as a dialogical partner.

Appendix A. Elaboration of the Grounding/Tracking/Crossing Curriculum

1) Grounding

a) In this series of courses each week's work would take its departure from the Scripture readings appointed for that week in the Christian church-year.

b) A likely lectionary – likely, for one thing, because of its ecumenical appeal – would be the new three-year, Roman Catholic “Ordo,” which already has been adopted by a variety of church bodies (Episcopalians, Presbyterians USA, ILCW, Joint Chaplains’ Board of the U.S. Armed Forces.)

c) One way to utilize the weekly readings in the Groundings courses would be to study all three lessons – Old Testament, Gospel and Epistle –each week. Thus: Monday class- session. Old Testament reading; Wednesday class-session, Gospel reading; Friday class- session, Epistle reading. That way, if a given congregation in the area is currently concentrating its weekly accent – its sermons, parish program, catechesis – upon, say, the Gospel pericope, then its pastor and interested lay people would be welcome to sit in as auditors on the Wednesday class-session.

d) Alternatively, the Scripture readings could be so organized as to devote, say, the entire fall semester to nothing but the Gospel readings for that semester, and the interim, to only the Old Testament readings for that month, and the spring semester, to only the Epistle readings for that semester. This alternative would allow for a full week of three class- sessions to be devoted to each pericope.

e) At any rate the theological work required for these courses in biblical Grounding ought to be definitely graduate level in quality, presupposing if possible a competence in the original biblical languages.

f) The biblical texts would of course not be all the student reads but would be supplemented by “introductory” materials from biblical-historical scholarship as well as by pertinent readings from theology past and present. There is already some table of experience for this format.

g) Above all, the pedagogical objective in these Grounding courses would be to enable the student to identify what it is in the biblical texts which so “grounds” – i.e., sufficiently justifies – the assertions they make as to characterize their assertions as Christian.

h) Approaching Scripture through the selections in the lectionary has the advantage of concentrating upon what in fact is the operative canon of most congregations’ biblical usage – “the layman’s Bible,” shall we say, which in view of how much Scripture it all embraces and how representatively scriptural it is, is hardly a label of condescension. Best of all, though, in the lectionary of the church-year the academic curriculum finds a natural link with the weekly round of the worshipping church. Crossings could exploit that link in a dozen ways with local congregations and also in its own (i.e. Crossings’ own) immediate life as a liturgical community.

2) Tracking

a) This dimension of Crossings’ curriculum is intended to monitor, to “track,” those issues and movements which are currently of interest to the secular world and hence to the church. Like the Grounding courses, the Tracking series likewise consists of two semester-long (fall and spring), three-credit courses and a third, month-long, two-credit course during the winter interim.

b) Such issues and movements as warrant tracking might include

the following: main themes in present-day TV programming; new ideas on who ought to be educated and at whose expense; sex and the public mindset; current meanings of responsibility and authority; what health-care today understands by "health"; the new populism; secularity and American folk religion; the coming scarcity, frugality and ascetism; death and dying; contemporary emphasis on being oneself; consumerism and participatory democracy; the high premium on being critical; pluralism as a life-style; Eastern religions in the West; how corporations are seeking social responsibility; the modern technology of managing people; money; confrontation as a mode of therapy, of evangelism, of political action; youth and aging; overcoming middle-class rage; female and feminine; what is news; ethnicity; violence; the way people care; work; humor and the holy; how government is being "by the people"; liberalism and conservatism.

c) The Tracking courses are an exercise, shall we say, in Worldwatch and their pedagogical objective is to train the theologian to be a listener, especially if his natural bent is to be a compulsive answerer or a chronic explainer. On the other hand, the sort of observing which is here envisioned is not passive but highly active and participatory. Here the theologian acts by asking questions. And the questions he asks stem from his own theological concerns – that is, from thoughtfully Christian concerns. He deliberately interrogates the world with Christian questions, not to exploit the world for the sake of some hidden agenda but to understand the world theologically. The risk is that in the process of so interrogating secular issues and movements, he over-asks or perhaps under- asks them, to the point where their secular adherents no longer recognize them for what they are. It is this risk that the courses in Tracking are designed to cope with.

d) Ideally, the student who is enrolled in the Tracking courses

will simultaneously be enrolled in the biblical courses in Grounding. What such synchronization assumes is that the secular issues and movements in the Tracking course will as much as possible be selected to coincide with related theological accents in the current weeks' pericopes.

e) The courses in Tracking, moving as they do from one set of issues and movements to the next, should be especially well suited to partition into separate components, each one almost self-contained. The advantage of that is their usability for separate short-term conferences and seminars, open to participation by the in-service, part-time fellows. That way the fulltime student who is enrolled in the course for a whole, sustained semester will profit from contact with a variety of fellows who come and go in the course, each new group bringing their own contributions and interests.

3) Crossing

a) This third dimension of the institute's curriculum entails, as the other two did, a fall semester and a spring semester, each for three credits, as well as a two-credit course during the winter interim.

b) The term "crossing," for those who are addicted to punning, could suggest a host of double meanings. (And why not admit it, a good many of those meanings are intended.) However, the immediate intention of the word has to do with a special kind of theological transaction, as the thoughtful Christian enjoys his faith – "the Word of the Cross" – crossing over into his secular calling and acting upon him within that calling.

c) "Enjoys" should not be too strong a word if this theological transaction has any chance of succeeding at all. For isn't it a massive fact of life today – indeed since the closing days of

the Reformation era and the early days of the Enlightenment, especially since the Industrial Revolution – that Christians in the secular sector are everywhere tempted, even encouraged, to see the Gospel as largely irrelevant to their secular lives, most of all to their occupations in the economic order? Beyond some general clues in the way of moral maxims and inducements, biddings and forbiddings – often little more than Christian etiquette – the secular realities are likely to seem devoid of any meaningful divine activity, whether in the form of divine creation or of divine judgment and much less of divine redemption. Correspondingly, the Christian is apt to find in his own secular identity, particularly at his job, very little really ultimate, let us say cosmic, significance. Much less is it apparent to him, or her, that the Christian church on a given Monday morning is a worldwide movement invading the secular sector the way the Letter to Diognetus perceived Christianity as the soul which animates the whole world. That being the case, theological transaction within Christians' secular vocations, if such transaction could at all materialize, would indeed be something to "enjoy."

d) Meanwhile, in response to this need, efforts in the church are multiplying to "involve" the laity, even to involve them in partnership with the clergy, and not without some rather intensive theological instruction. Witness, for instance, the Kennedy Program or the Bethel Bible Series or the Christian Businessmens' Association.

But even programs of this sort, for all the good they undoubtedly do, still threaten to concentrate the lay person's attention on his explicit role as church-member, on what he or she does on Sunday mornings or after working-hours. Or if the objective is to involve him in ministry during working-hours, the sort of ministry which is envisioned is one which has him verbalizing explicit Christian testimony for some customer's or

fellow- employee's religious conversion and improvement. That is important, of course. But the implication remains that then the most satisfying moments at work have very little to do with the secular job-description of the work itself. Then the world's work, on its own term, is apparently something in which God does not have much interest except grudgingly. The Christian is apt to respond in kind, and by reaction may turn to look for "Christian" work, if at all, in off-hours "church-work." But then church comes hazardously close to being an escape.

e) However, the immediate target audience of the Crossing courses is, like the Grounding and Tracking courses, not the lay Christians but the professional servants of the church who need an adequate theology to minister to these lay Christians, precisely in their secular vocations. Still, it is unthinkable that such a theology of secular vocations could be taught and learned, and first of all even articulated, except in the closest association with Christian laity where and when they are in their secular roles. It is only to be expected, therefore, that much of the time in the Crossing courses would need to be spent "on location," somewhat as in Concordia Seminary's present "Urban Quarter" (T.I.M.E.) course, though with even more sustained and long-range exposure to a single secular sector and with even more theological articulation and testing. Notice, by the way, that the measure of participation by the institute's fellows increases from the Grounding courses to the Tracking courses and climaxes in the Crossing courses.

f) This is not yet the place to elaborate the specific theological themes which might be expected to surface in the Crossing courses. But one sketchy example might be the subversive manichaeism, the denigration of the world which has bedeviled post- Enlightenment life in the West, and which later on experienced a temporary though incomplete solution in early twentieth century Protestant liberalism, and which might yet

rediscover a more radically Christian solution in the down-to-earth accents of Reformation, patristic and biblical theologies. At any rate the Crossing courses would build directly not only upon the Tracking courses with their analysis of the contemporary world but at least as much upon the Grounding courses, so that Christian theology and ministry have something to cross over from and with, not just to.

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