

Post-Election Conversation; the January Seminar

Colleagues,

Responses rolled in to the post of two weeks ago about the election of Mr. Trump. I send you a selection of them today. It's as close as we're able to come to conversation about such things within this reading-and-writing community that I spoke of in the post. Unless, of course, one makes a trip to the annual Crossings event in Belleville, Illinois, a three-day conference in even-numbered years, a two-day seminar in odd ones. One of the latter is now scheduled for January 22-24, so I want to tell you about that too. It will offer lots of opportunity for face-to-face talking, especially about the one piece of unimpeachably good news that went public on the Day of Pentecost, and is still floating through the world. Christ Jesus is in charge, as we celebrated this past Sunday, the enduring questions being where, and how, and to what present ends. I hope many of you will be able to join that conversation.

Peace and Joy,
Jerry Burce

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"So Where is God Now?"

The Belleville Seminar, January 22-24

I start with the seminar, so that any and all who are interested won't miss the information and can act quickly on it. The event will happen in not quite two months at our usual meeting site, the Shrine of our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois, fifteen minutes or so from downtown St. Louis. A detailed

schedule and registration information is available on the [Crossings website](#).

Two major items are on the agenda.

First, Steven Kuhl will lead a classic Crossings workshop as pioneered in the 1980's and '90s by Bob Bertram and Ed Schroeder. The aim is to crack open a Biblical text in such a way that what emerges is the Word of God, both Law and Gospel, addressing us in the particularities of our lives today. A distinct methodology is involved. Steve will teach that, as he did this past September for a group of pastors and church leaders in Singapore.

Steve's texts are the Gospel readings from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) that we'll be hearing in church this coming Epiphany season. As we engage the texts, the question he'll push us to ask is "Where is God Now," as in "now the election is over," or "now that half the country is cheering and the other half is writhing in dismay." Where indeed is God for a Crossings community in which some cheer and others writhe, as you'll see below when we get to reactions to my post.

Intruding on this discussion will be the agenda's second large item. This will be a conversation about Crossings itself, centered on questions that the Crossings board is grappling with as it works to develop a vision for the future of the community and a plan to carry the vision forward. Here we pray for the presence and participation of many "old hands," whose wisdom and insight the board hopes to draw on. Those leading the conversation will have their dials turned to listening mode, so please, count on the opportunity to say your piece and have it heard,

The cost of the seminar is \$200. That includes lodging and all meals except supper on Sunday evening. There will special breaks

for persons attending a Crossings seminar or conference for the first time: half price if you're a lay person, no charge at all if enrolled at a seminary.

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**Selected Responses to Thursday Theology #895,
"The necessity of Christ for his Christians, post election"**

I pass these along without comment, except to thank those who either sent them to me or helped me in some other way to notice them. -JEB

1. *From Jim Squire, a software engineer, lay preacher, and writer of Crossings text studies-*

I have begun to associate the word apocalypse with this election. I don't know if I am right, but it seems like the veil has been lifted on that segment of the Trump revolution which traffics proudly in racism, white supremacy, etc. that we have assumed was no longer plaguing us. Trump has not only lifted that veil, but he has given them permission to enjoy the fresh air and believe it's their turn. And now we can no longer easily argue as a nation that these problems have been resolved. The argument is over, the apocalypse is here, at least on that score. There's no longer anywhere to hide—in fact there's no desire to hide.

2. *From Dianne Cecchett, a self-identified independent voter, and a gracious Thursday Theology reader with whom I exchanged a couple of notes this past summer-*

Your commentary amazes me. I guess Love doesn't Trump hate.

Trump is not nearly as bad as you are allowing yourself to

believe or be led to believe by a blatantly biased and shameful media. He has faults as we all do but even King David committed adultery and murder and was loved by God. He was a man after God's own heart. Clinton's "sins" reach much deeper than Trump's, all the way to an arrogance that refused to cooperate in the wake of four deaths in Benghazi. That is unconscionable.

I for one, am proud of Donald Trump. Proud of his brilliance and his amazing courage as that of his family. He told his supporters we would win and it has never felt so good. The man has stood up to a vicious beating by the press, the Democratic Party and its supporters, and even the Republican base. It would have killed a lesser man. Did you just expect him not to retaliate in any way? He didn't have to take any of it. He could have just continued on. He has a great business and a fortune.

I trust in God. I will not be rocked by either a Hillary Clinton or a Donald Trump. I will not judge either Trump or Clinton with a wrath that I thought only belonged to fundamentalist groups.

I look forward to the future. And I am not embarrassed or ashamed of who I voted for. God bless Donald J. Trump.

3. *From Simon Burce, an attorney with a background in academic theology-*

This was the first election in my lifetime when I carried around a profound sense of unease the next day. I know I'm not alone...in this hour of uncertainty.

That said, in these past few days that initial uncertainty has been joined by a sense of genuine joy. And by that I mean a deep sense of purpose, a renewed calling to respond to the challenges of today by reflecting on God's gift to us in Christ and responding to that gift with courage and conviction. I recall

reading in your church's monthly newsletter that the congregation had had enough with being a "welcoming" place. How easy it is for old Adam to feel satisfied knowing that as long as he's not putting off anyone that would seek out his community, that he's doing a good job in God's eyes. There's an analogy, I think, in the public sector where I for one was very comfortable thinking that the country was drifting forward in the right direction and so long as we had a decent, kind and thoughtful leader in the Oval Office I was off the hook for what happens next. Perhaps I've been too complacent. In fact, I know I have. And so, for that matter, have many people in our country, including some who occupy leadership positions in both major parties and in the media. Shame on the Democrats for ignoring the profound suffering and fear of a huge portion of our country's population, or for giving lip service to their troubles while focusing more sustained efforts on issues that suited the interests of the more powerful among their constituents. Shame on the Republicans for having no cognizable policy agenda these last 8 years, other than to willfully oppose and defy any of President Obama's policies. Shame on Donald Trump for preying on the fears of so many Americans and leveraging those fears for his own self interest. And shame on the media for spending more time in Trump Tower discussing tweets and trashy headlines than writing about the profound effects of globalization on the American working class. And shame on all of us for not taking Trump seriously and for presuming that he had no possibility of taking the Presidency just because he is so uniquely and utterly unqualified for the job that he ultimately won.

In all of this, I think we have to say God Bless America for being a country where we have the right to choose or not to choose to let Donald Trump, a gold-plated two bit hustler from Queens, NY, be our president. Where there is no birthright to

power, nobody can claim our presidency for themselves—not the Clintons, nor the Bushes. This president was chosen by us, and we'll need to deal with the consequences of that choice. However it's reassuring to know that we can affect that choice in ways big and small, limited only by the time, talent, and energy that we can give toward the cause. May the Holy Spirit continue to inspire us all to strive toward that more perfect union that remains always in front of us.

4. *By Jan Peter Heinstein, in a comment on the Facebook page of Pr. Jochen Teuffel (see [ThTheol 861](#)), where #895 was linked—*

Cool, aber die rassistische Spaltung der protestantischen Kirchen in USA könnte er mehr betonen. Das erinnert an alte Zeiten Südafrikas. [Cool, but he could have given greater emphasis to the racist division in the Protestant churches in the USA, which calls to mind old times in South Africa.]

5. *From Kurt Hendel, Professor Emeritus of Reformation History at LSTC—*

Christ is, indeed, our hope, and Christ is also our assurance that God is present within and among us and that God will never forsake us. This is the promise that we not only trust but that we also have the privilege to share with all people, no matter who their choice for President was. Christ has already made all things new. The Light already shines in the darkness, and the darkness will never overcome it. Now we need to have the courage to reflect the Light in our words and actions.

6. *From Pr. John Hitzeroth (ELCA), in a laconic note of the sort old friends and classmates will share—*

For your consideration: "[Stop Shaming Trump Supporters](#)," by Michael Lerner in The New York Times.

7. From Joel Grumm, a companion at a few of our Crossings conferences—

I've been wrestling with my own cognitive dissonance around the "evangelical Christian theology" in my west Michigan neighborhood for more than 20 years now, which embraces a libertarian philosophy. And I too am challenged to understand people I care about and (can hopefully still) respect as "decent folk" in spite of embracing an unabashed racist, misogynist narcissist who is now "my"/"our" president. At the same time, my own anger at others and indeed myself might consume me but for Jesus. Guess I'd better reflect on the messages of my namesake and "return to the Lord your God for He is gracious and merciful..." and then get back to work trying to live the two commandments as best I'm able where God places me...

"Have no fear little flock" may be my "theme song" for the foreseeable future as I stumble forward with my brothers and sisters regardless our 2016 vote...

8. From Christine Lehman, another conference companion—

I think I will up my contributions to the large number of local organizations in Valpo working for peace, justice and mercy, and maybe only read the news once a week. And pray, a lot, and a lot of that for forgiveness, and not for others alone...

9. Finally, back we go to Steve Kuhl, whose introduction to next month's seminar is also a response of sorts to the matters raised in #895—

Whether it has to do with the personal life or public life, when events and changes overwhelm and disturb our comfort level, people today often frame spiritual questions in the language of God's presence or lack thereof. So where is God now? But that is not the way the "God-question" arises in the Bible. For it evades the basic biblical truth that God is active everywhere.

Therefore, not "where is God now" but "what is God doing now" is the constant God-message of the ancient prophets—and of Jesus. "WHAT is God doing now in your world, your life—and WHAT are YOU doing in response to that?" From the Bible's very beginning (Genesis 3) it is God who is doing the questioning "Adam, where are you?" and it is "Adam" (i.e., we humans) who is the evasive one, with social conflict, blame gaming and scapegoating ("It's the fault of the woman you gave me") being the form this evasion takes. Sound familiar?

But raising incriminating questions (the Bible calls that "law") is not the only thing God is doing in the world. He is also offering an incredible answer to that question (called the "gospel") in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, one that begins with forgiveness and culminates in a new creation. Take, for example, the two criminals on crosses next to Jesus (Lk 23:32-38) as an illustration. The first seeks a messiah who will help him evade the sentence of condemnation he deserves. There is no such thing. The second seeks a messiah who will carry him through the condemnation he deserves. Jesus is that kind of messiah and savior. The second criminal's incredible leap of faith ("Jesus, remember me...") is given credibility as Jesus responds, "Today, you are with me in paradise."

This "question/answer" (law/gospel) complex will serve as our starting point as we wrestle to cross the Word of God to our world after November 8, 2016. The workshop program will follow the three step Crossings pattern:

- + Tracking our world today with help from secular analysts and your observations
- + Grounding our thought in the Matthean texts (Sermon on the Mount) for Epiphany,
- + Crossing the two sets of data into each, exploring the possibilities for discipleship in our post-November 8 world.

Again the dates and place: January 22-24, Shrine of our Lady of the Snow, Belleville, IL. Hope you can be there!