

Reflections on the 2007 Crossings Conference, Part 2

Colleagues,

Some more comments from conference-goers. Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

I was at the Crossings Conference and I was pleased with the focus on hermeneutics and the proclamation of law and gospel rather than on effecting social change. Referring to the participant you quote in the letter this week I will say that "Faith as a transformative force in the world" is not the same thing as "the church speaking out on global warming, social justice and immigration reform."

Ed, I have strong feelings about this topic, but I've never been able to successfully express them without scandalizing some other followers of Jesus. I know this because I tried to a few times during the conference. And, unless I believe myself to be a prophet (and I do not) then there will come a time when I must submit humbly to the sense of the Community.

However, I am not yet sufficiently humble to do that.

Allow me to say a few things that on later reflection I may judge to have gone off the deep end.

This world before the parousia will never be a place of justice, mercy or peace. All I, or the church, ask of God in this world is a space in which repentance and the Gospel may be

proclaimed. The purpose of the Church is not to work for social justice or for peace in the way the world understands these things. Our mandate is to show the world Christ crucified and to petition the Spirit that all may soon be recapitulated in Jesus Christ. It is in that recapitulation, that "re-heading" of all creation in Jesus Christ, that we understand Peace and Justice will arrive.

Our attempts to comfort, feed and clothe the miserable will never be more than palliative. Ultimately, outside of Jesus Christ, all comfort, food and protection fail. It is the world's task to offer these temporary solutions, it is ours to offer eternal ones.

"Transformative faith is a force in the world" because such faith is the work of the Spirit using Word and Sacraments to bring the whole of creation to new life in Jesus Christ.

The church appropriately ministers in the world by comforting, feeding and clothing when it uses that ministry as way of pointing to the ultimate healing granted us in Jesus Christ. This is the way that our Lord himself used such ministry. And so, in these ministries the name of Jesus must always be elevated. However, the resources of the church in this world are finite, and ultimately they must be focused on proclaiming the forgiveness of sin for Jesus' sake.

I know from experience that some brothers and sisters will disagree with this, and I gratefully accept their correction. I hope at a minimum we might agree on the following: "The purpose of the Church is not to work for social justice or for peace in the way the world understands these things. Our mandate is to show the world Christ crucified and to petition the Spirit that all may soon be recapitulated in Jesus Christ."

Ed, the above words seem disjointed to me which is a sure sign

that my thoughts are also. I don't expect a response from you, I suspect your correspondence load is heavy enough!

I write especially to thank you for the work you and the committee put into preparing the Conference. If another is offered I will surely try to attend.

*Bob Boudewyns
Altoona, Iowa*

I guess I'm not surprised that someone was unhappy in the way you described. And, since I was one of the speakers, I shouldn't be one of those who responds, since it would smack of self-justification.

If I were to respond, however, I'd simply say that this was a conversation about law and gospel, not a gathering of prophets, politicians, or social action strategists.

The organizers didn't invite politicians or social action strategists. That prophets didn't show up is God's doing, I presume. God calls and sends prophets. Self-proclaimed prophets are all over the place, and they usually make plenty of noise and get abundant attention. I have no clue why self-proclaimed prophets failed to show up or seek a hearing at Our Lady of Snows.

I would also guess that many people in attendance at the conference are active in organized as well as personal efforts to address issues of injustice, racism, hunger, etc., and they all work at transformation. However, they didn't feel a need to speak of that, given the nature of the occasion.

So, there's my two-cents worth—and more evidence of how much a churchly misfit I am.

Blessings!
Fred Niedner
Theology Department
Valparaiso University

I guess I agree that the emphasis was not on world transformation, but that was OK as in my view the session descriptions never suggested there would be. However, I felt that Joe Strelan's keynote was a start along those lines, as was his break-out more of the same. I got what I came for—a deeper understanding of the Diagnosis-Prognosis/6 step process for text unpacking. I would have appreciated more of the crossing part you did with Sherm. Another of those would have been a great bonus.

The only real downside was what appeared to me to be a limited understanding of Islam. Not so much in your Crossing, Ed, but in the questions raised/answers given. I checked on the book that was held up, Abraham's Children, and it's a bit pricey for me. There's a similar, but less expensive, book that has Joan Chittister as one of the authors, so I may get that one. If you ever hold a conference in Dearborn, MI, I promise some expertise will be available. You may be aware that we have a mission ELCA church in Dearborn these days. I hope to take your Crossing to Pastor Rani and discuss it with him.

I think, also, that the firehose approach to the session about the "New Paul" was way too much. I absorbed nothing from that.

In summary, as a SAM [=Synodically Authorized Minister] from the SE Mich Synod, I was thrilled to be with all of you. The location and general organization were fabulous. I have already sent my thanks to Cathy on that front. I hope there are more, and I do look forward to the on-line plans. Hope we'll be kept

apprised of implementation status now and then.

One other small point. It was great to celebrate the Eucharist, and I wonder if there was any difficulty getting permission, given the RC venue. When Bishop Schreiber was installed here in SEMI the local RC leadership would not allow our communion in their building. I also believe the same reception was given by the local LCMS folks. We ended up in a Methodist church.

George Evalt