

The Crossings Curriculum of 1983-93 (Continued) with a Spinoff on Atonement Theories!

Colleagues,

In response to last week's show-and-tell about the Crossings courses of ancient days some of you (not a groundswell, but one did come from Mexico!) think the Crossings board should think about making some of these courses available online. Crossings prez Steve Kuhl says it's on the agenda. That got me snooping through the one file-cabinet drawer chockablock with manila folders from those 21 courses. Also to remembering more items from that era.

For example, Bob Bertram's noting that if/when a student had taken ten—any ten—of these three-credit courses (the equivalent of one academic year at a seminary) she would have this on her transcript: studied ten books of the Bible, learned about 10 significant eras/movements in church history, come to terms with ten different samples of contemporary theology, AND written 10 essays practicing her skill in crossing this theology over into ten slices-of-life in her world today.

What seminary in the world, asked Bob, a seminary professor himself for half of his lifespan, offers anything like this to students in their first year curriculum? [Answer; none.] So maybe Crossings Courses Online is not a bad idea.

Back to those 21 fat file folders. Some stuff I found:

ADDITIONAL TITLES FOR STUDENT ESSAYS

*crossing a slice-of-life-today with the theology we studied#503
Crossings from II Corinthians 5: Righting History's Wrongs*

- *God in Christ Reconciling the World of Nuclear Threat*
- *Death and Resurrection in the Computer Revolution*
- *The "Structurally Unemployed:" Their Alienation and "Reconciliation"*
- *"Making His Appeal Through Us:" Advertising and Ambassadorship*
- *Managerial Efficiency and the Christian Apostolate*
- *Must Play Be Work, May Work – Even Cruciform Work – Be Play?*
- *"That We Might Become the Righteousness of God": A Clue for Family Therapy*
- *From Bulemia to Boldness for Loving: A Life Story*
- *Assertiveness Training and 2 Corinthians 5*

#508 Crossings from Philippians: Winning by Losing

- *Health Care Technology and Right to Die*
- *Winning by Losing in Coping with AIDS*

#510 Crossings from Acts: Hearing the Healing

- *Neurosis: A Block to Hearing the Healing*
- *Hearing the Healing Through Art*
- *Hearing the Healing Though Educationally Handicapped*
- *Hearing the Healing In the Face of Grief*

#512 Crossings from 1 Corinthians: Power and Wisdom Up Against the Cross

- *Theology of the Cross in John Chrysostom and Thomas Merton*

#515 Crossings from Favorite Biblical Texts of the Reformation: Locating Good News That's Trustworthy

- *Reformation Theology and Ordaining Gays and Lesbians*
- *Crossing Modern Pop Culture with the Reformers' Favorite Biblical Texts*

#519 *Crossings from Genesis: From Creation to New Creation*

- *New Creation in "A Handmaid's Tale"*
- *New / Old Creation on the Names of God*

And that leads to the spinoff on atonement theories. How, pray tell, you ask, does that happen? Well, like this:

Tucked away in those archival files was this sheet:

"The Crossings Curriculum – A Three-Column Summary of Problem & Solution Central to Each Course

| Biblical Book | Issue | The Good News for this Issue |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 501 Luke. | Conflict/Disorder. | The Peace on Earth at Bethlehem |
| 502 Isaiah | Chronic Injustice | Mercy in God's Suffering Justice |
| 503 II Cor. | Wrong-doing | Making Our Wrongs Right |
| 504 John | Confused Priorities | New Birth/New Priorities |
| 505 Matt. | Authority Conflicts | Upside-Down Authority |
| 506 Psalms | Rejection | How God Rehabs Rejects |
| 507 Eph. | Despair/Depression | Hope that Succeeds |
| 508 Phil. | Losers | Winning by Losing |
| 509 Hebrews | Burnout | Christ's Self-sacrifice Success |

| | | |
|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 510 Acts | Cry for Healing | Hearing the Spirit's Healing |
| 511 I Peter | Shame & Suffering | Unshaming the Suffering |
| 512 1 Cor. | Hi-Tech Culture | Hooking Culture to the Cross |
| 513 Revelation | Apocalypse Now | Survival |
| 514 Romans | Daily Life Legalism | A Faith that Has what it Takes |
| 515 Ref.texts | "Other Gospels" | A Foundation You can Trust |
| 516 2 Cor. | Life without Spirit | Holy Spirit & Human Spirit |
| 517 Galatians | Ethics | Freedom |
| 518 Mark | Nobody-ness | How to Become Somebody |
| 519 Genesis | Creation | New Creation |
| 520 Acts | World Religions | The Gospel's Promise |
| 521 Psalms | Alienation | Acceptance |

Reflection.

Inside every one of these issue/solution pairs is an atonement model that widely expands the so-called "classical" atonement models of Anselm, Irenaeus and Abelard: Christ the Substitute, Christ the Victor, Christ the Moral Role.Model. And the reason behind that is that the Scriptures themselves are manifold in the metaphors, theories [Remember the Greek word theoria is a visual word. Means a picture, a viewing], images used to communicate what was "good and new" about the "Good News" of the crucified and risen Messiah. There are many theories/pictures—way more than the alleged classics—already in the Bible of the transaction soon to be commemorated in Holy Week and Easter. And there's no reason not to expect more. Blessed Bob's "sweet swap," for instance.

Some time ago I posted this list of samples for going beyond the standard three:

Thus for the BAD NEWS of guilt, it's the GOOD NEWS of Christ as forgiveness;
for shame, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is acceptance;
for enslavement, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is freedom;
for death, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is his conquest of death;
for oppression, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is rescue and liberation;
for despair/depression, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is hope;
for fear, the GOOD NEWS of Christ is an invitation to faith:
"Fear not, just trust me."
for do-gooder works-righteousness, the GOOD NEWS is free (gift) righteousness, and so on.

In each one of these is a different picture, different theory, and every one of them moves from bad news to good news via Holy Week and Easter. They are all imaging Christ's death and resurrection.

Gustav Aulen, a 20th century proponent of the Christus Victor atonement theory as the "best one,"[in his 1931 book by that title], claims Luther to be in that tradition. That is true, but that is not the whole truth. Luther is all over the map on atonement theories. And no wonder, since his full-time job was interpreting the Bible at Wittenberg university, he was all over the map because his textbook was all over the map on atonement images..

Take a look at the one paragraph in Luther's Small Catechism—referenced here four weeks ago, TT 663—on the meaning of the second article of the Apostles Creed—with my [bracketed] addenda.

“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord [lordship is an ownership term]. He has redeemed me [ownership transfer], a lost [needing to be found] and condemned sinner [under judgment, in need of forgiveness] purchased [ownership transfer] and won me from death and from the power of the devil [Christus victor] , not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death [cultic sacrifice], so that I may be his own [ownership transfer again] and live under him in his kingdom [regime change] and serve him [new master] in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness [purity replacing impurity]; even as he is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity [life that lasts vs. death that terminates]. This is most certainly true.”

One of the vexations for some theologians in current atonement theory debates is that God the Father comes off as an abusive parent in compelling the Son to suffer and die for sinners. The mistake here is the Arian notion of the Trinity haunting this objection. Arian in the sense that the Son is not within the Godhead, but some less-than-God agent on the receiving end of action from the deity.

Not so orthodox Trinitarian theology. If the Nicene creed means what it says, the second person of the Trinity is “God of God, yes, very God of very God.” Couldn’t be more God-full. With the full deity of the trinitarian Son now incarnate in Jesus, it is God the Son, not God the Father’s demi-deity subordinate, going to the cross on his own volition, not compelled by some deity beyond himself.

In the words of Paul Gerhardt’s Lenten hymn:

The Lamb of God—the Lamb who IS God—goes uncomplaining forth,

*Our guilty burden bearing;
And laden with the sins of earth,
None else the burden sharing.
Goes patient on, grows weak and faith,
To slaughter led without complaint,
That spotless life to offer:
Bears shame and stripes and wounds and death,
Anguish and mockery and saith,
"WILLING all this I suffer."*

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder