

C-R is for Cleopas' [and companions'] Redemption

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' ²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸As they came near the village to

which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:13-35)

Maybe we shouldn't quibble about Easter. Some have. Take, for example, Cleopas and his companion (St. Peter? Cleopas' spouse?). They were quibbling on the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

Today we might hear of quibbling about Easter from writers of fiction to producers of films. In an age where anything can be asserted, just about everything is.

But what's most on the hearts and minds of Cleopas and his companions (even us) is the hope of Easter. "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." This hope is hard to embrace if the hard "things" (like persecution and death) are the final realities of life.

Yet, in the early accompaniment of just Cleopas and his companion, the hard "things," or hard facts, is all they have to go on. There **was** a man, Jesus of Naz-

O-S is for Opening Scriptures

Yet this "Stranger" (we the readers know who He is) who joins Cleopas and his companion(s) seems most bristled by letting the facts of "these things" speak for themselves. We must not take his chastising as belittling the other companions' lack of faith (though it is that, too), but as belittling the power "these things" have over them. What is most problematic for faith is when we come to believe the wrong things as true. And for this Stranger, the wrong things to believe are that the deadly, mortal "things" have the final word.

According to this Stranger, they do not. "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things?" The Stranger does not diminish this necessity, which means he does not diminish the power of "these things." But neither does he let "these things" have the final word. That belongs to Messiah! The same Messiah who **suffers** these things [we might add, "out of existence!"].

From there he takes his accompanied companions back into the Scriptures to see their evangelical import. The Scriptures only become opened through the lens of the Messiah—otherwise, they remain a closed book, to our already closed hearts and our blinded eyes. But when the gospel is the key to our faith and vision, then the Scriptures open.



Ed Schroeder delivering the keynote address at the Honest-to-God Gospel Crossings Conference, held at Our Lady of the Snows retreat center in Belleville, Illinois, January 29-31.

areth, who **was** a prophet mighty in word and deed, but he was **handed over** to be **condemned to death** and **crucified**. And when reports came from women who saw his tomb but not his body, we **found** it just as the women had said, but there **was** no Jesus. So it should come as no surprise that even hope itself is also in the past tense: "we **had** hoped."

No longer are they hoping. They are despairing, standing still, sad.

That's where these deadly, past "things" can leave us. Does God? If these things/facts speak for themselves, we might not have much reason to think that God would do otherwise than leave us with these "things." Facts be known, there would be justification for God to do so, if that was God's final design.



Robert Kolb made two presentations at the Crossings conference: "Using Law-Gospel to Interpret Scripture" and "Luther's Reading of the Human Condition."

And with the Messiah's opening of scriptures there comes also the opening of our hearts and minds. Here the talking about "these things" is now cast into a whole new light, so that even Cleopas confesses, "were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

***N-G** is for Newly Gathered*

One of the central concerns for the church these days is how to bring this promising message to bear upon those who are "unchurched." The unchurched are those without a church home. They may be those who have left the church for some reason; or they may be those who never were part of the church.

But there is sometimes a misnomer in the very idea of differentiating the unchurched from the churched. Truth is, both share a great deal in common.

Both have had experiences living in this world, with not only the evils that permeate life in control, manipulation, and domination, but also the critical experiences of living life under the law. And this leads to the same dilemma with which Cleopas and his companion on the road were struggling: despair, depression, being downtrodden.

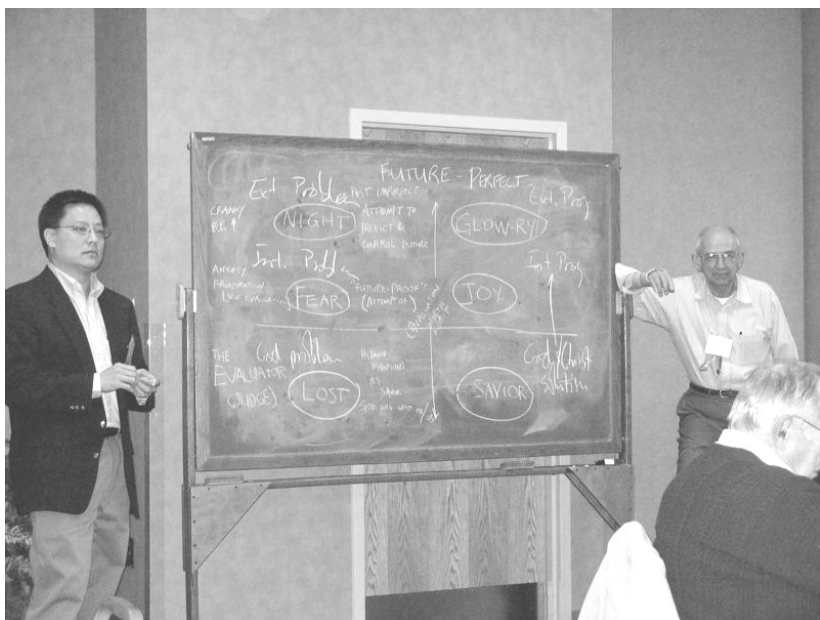
That's the point on which we may want to focus first—or maybe better, confess first.

Today, programs of congregational renewal like to use the word "transformation." It is sometimes used in popular catch phrases like, "the transforming power of the reign of God."

Let's unpack those words. "Transformation" means changing the form or shape that was into some other form or shape—quite literally, shaping [form] across [trans].

The agent for the change is "reign of God." To be sure, the "reign of God" in Jesus the Christ does bring a change. Note the change in Cleopas and his companions once Easter finally settles in, by faith.

If understood and used in this New Testament perspective, these may be helpful ways to express the mission of the church in this twenty-first century. But the words get muddled when the word "transformation" is tied to projects of the church in "justice" or "critique" of principalities and powers that



Sherman Lee (left) and Ed Schroeder (right) on the pre-conference day, explaining "tracking" and "crossing." How do we link the Gospel by way of the Crossings matrix to peoples' real lives?

***S-I** is for Saying, "Indeed!" The Lord is risen!*

And finally, it is not only the Stranger/Messiah who shares these new things, but also Cleopas and his companions who now are in full reverse, hightailing it back to Jerusalem with haste. When they get there, they are greeted by the other companions who say to them, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" That only sparks Cleopas and friend to piggy-tail on the good news: wait till you hear our story! What new "things" have happened on the road! How Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread! Faith begets faith. The old things have passed away; behold, the Lord makes new!

This is a much more promising way to talk. Also a more promising way to walk. Thanks to the risen Jesus' company!

undermine the lives of people. Then the question becomes one of theological clarity. Is this the same “transforming power of the reign of God” in Jesus the Christ?

To be sure, Christians and non-Christians (church and unchurched) engage in the mutual venture of pursuing the goals of justice and the critique of unjust principalities and powers. In fact, to do so is evidence of a “reign of God.” But it is not “**the** reign of God” in the gospel of Jesus the Christ. The just/critical reign of God is the law. The justified/promising reign of God is the gospel. Christians empowered by “**the** reign of God” that Jesus proclaimed and lived can find added impetus (by faith) for lifting up the banner of the alternate, legal “reign of God” for the good of all.

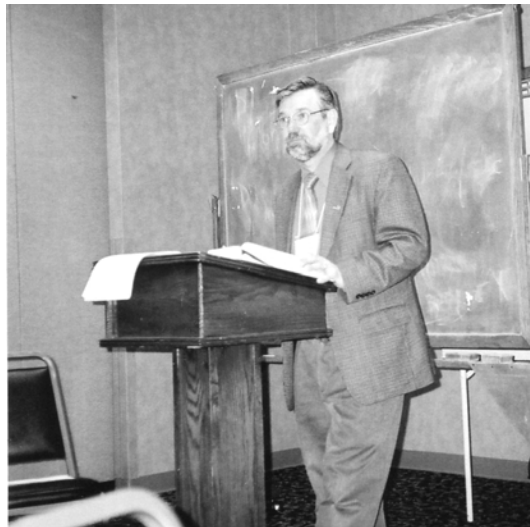
But is engaging in that kind of divine critique of principalities and powers finally “transforming”? Maybe when justice gets done, “these things” are a little better than they were before. That is to say, there can be some “saving” that takes place under the law, through critical interaction. But ultimately, finally, the form is not really changed—not at its root. It is still the same-old, same-old, with just a different face, maybe a more compassionate-looking face, but with a root that is just as legal (perhaps even legalistic) as the same old face that was there before it. Behaviors may be changed, but not the spirit.

Note that the one hope of the unchurched Cleopas and his companions was for redemption. Redeeming is about the “reign of God” that Jesus was all about: how to buy people back, like a long-lost relative, from all those principalities and powers (“these things”)—**including** the power of the law—that seem to keep them depressed in the spirit of disappointment, sadness, and despair.

The church needs to come clean on **this** “transforming power of the reign of God”! How much then would we speak boldly the good news of resurrection, not only for the unchurched but for the church!



John Strelan from Australia delivered the keynote: “Honest-to-God Gospel Meets a Dying World.”



Crossings President Steve Kuhl delivered two presentations linking Law-Gospel theology to ecumenism and the faith/science debate.

In fact, unless we are boldly proclaiming this new Word, I could understand why the unchurched might just as well stay away, taking their chances with what they already have in the law of life. It would be better than their gathering in the church for all the wrong reasons.

But the risen Lord of Cleopas and his companions has a right reason for us to gather in newness. People do get authentically transformed when the form is finally “trans”—taken a-cross, through the cross of Jesus the Christ, and right into Easter. That only happens by faith, and through the grace of Jesus’ “opening the scriptures” (Word) and “breaking of the bread” (sacraments).

This is why the Reformers were so impassioned about lifting up Word and sacrament as central to what it means for us, essentially, to be church. “It is enough for the true unity of the church” to be so grounded in this redeeming Jesus-Word-and-Sacrament (Augsburg Confession, Article 7). Here is where transforming, life-giving faith is born and nourished.

In other words, what Jesus is seeking to do is get us out from under the bondage to all critique, including the most damning critique of all: our sinfulness. This same sinfulness is evidenced in the despair of our hearts, evidenced in our own eyes. Yet when only the law and/or evil seems to rule and regulate life, when we are handed over to such as these, then breaks in the promise of the Lord who is our one, true companion. Nix on these things! Newness is here!

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S is for *Snapshots*

I won't even **attempt** to give an in depth, unbiased report of the **Honest-to-God Gospel** Crossings Conference held last January 29-31, 2007 so instead, I'll settle for some snapshots, both verbal and visual, to give you a glimpse of the marvelous occasion it was. People (128 to be exact) left satisfied and enthused, in fact, some complained there was almost **too much** good stuff: They regretted that they had to choose between speakers (they wanted to hear them all!) and wished there had been more time to digest and discuss what they heard. We planners have taken this complaint/critique to heart, but it's also a compliment, don't you think? Better **too much** substance than too little?

One snapshot I'll forever treasure is watching Ed Schroeder deliver the kickoff keynote address titled



Stephan Turnbull, our youngest Sabbaththeology writer, addressed "Today's Debates on How to Read St. Paul."

"So, what brought you to this conference?" with this response: "I found you on the web! I have become interested in Law-Gospel theology, found your website, started reading it regularly and very much appreciate what I read. When I saw you were having a conference, I decided to come learn more about Law-Gospel theology." Why does that delight my heart? Because he came for exactly the reasons we intended: to promote, explain, and discuss Law-Gospel theology.

"The Augsburg Aha! The Gospel is a Promise, an Honest-to-God Promise!" (see picture on page 2.) You could tell by Ed's passion how much he loves teaching, sharing, and using the Law-Gospel hermeneutic. His address set the stage for the rest of the conference.

A snapshot that delights my heart is a conversation I had with someone who answered my question,

Another snapshot was watching Jerry Burce on the pre-conference day working mightily to explain the Crossings matrix. Again, more time would have helped, but people **did** get it and loved it, and left enthused about using it. Here is one person's comment: "I am a preacher for whom preaching had become a tedious chore. I believe the conference has really energized me for the task of preaching. It reminded me of things I already knew and also gave me new insights into looking at the text. I have returned with a fire in the belly for preaching. I don't know if I am a better preacher but I feel like I have something to say now and I think the conference has made that difference."



Samuel Wang (left) enjoying breakfast with Dinku Lamessa (right)

I also enjoyed watching our international guests make connections with us U.S. folks. Pictured above, Dinku Lamessa, national coordinator of University Student Ministry of the Mekane Jesus Church, came all the way from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Sam Wang, pastor, came from the Lutheran Church of Singapore. In addition, John Strelan traveled from Australia to give both a keynote speech and two breakout sessions titled "What Drives My Life." Rudolf Keller, Bavarian pastor and professor, came from Germany to share his insights of Werner Elert. The four shared their experiences of how they articulate the Good News to their respective secular, materialistic, dying worlds.

Always etched in my mind will be watching the animated conversations between attendees. Some were old friends reuniting after many years, others were meeting for the first time. For some, this was a Seminex reunion, and/or reunion of the students of



Above, Kit Kleinhans delivered keynote "Honest-to-God Gospel as Source of the Church's Life and Freedom for the Church's Mission."

Below left, Rudolf Keller, keynoter from Germany ("Being Faithful to the Bible While Engaging in Scholarly Theology: The Work of Werner Elert") enjoying breakfast with Matthew Becker (right) who spoke on "The Theologian as Servant of the Church."



Bob Bertram and Ed Schroeder. But what really touched my heart was seeing and knowing that there were people from all expressions of Lutheranism who didn't know Bob and Ed, who didn't know about Seminex, but were there because they cared about Law-Gospel theology and wanted to connect with like-minded people and learn from each other.

Another lingering snapshot is a conversation with an excited couple (both lay) who approached some of us board members at the end of the conference and made an impassioned plea that Crossings remember, and even target, lay people in future conferences. They believed strongly that laypeople are open to and capable of using the Crossings matrix to link faith and lives. What a stimulating challenge this

couple left us with, and again, we're taking it to heart. In fact, I'm thinking that working the Crossings matrix—all aspects, the grounding, tracking, and crossings—is what we do best. We'd love to make ourselves available to teach it, so why don't you ask us to come do just that? Don't wait for another conference, just host a workshop. If you ask, we **will** come!

Some snapshots you **don't** see, either because there are just too many, or we don't have good pictures, are of all our other distinguished speakers. And we had a plethora! We had four keynote addresses and sixteen breakout presentations, all too good to miss.

Some presenters are shown throughout the newsletter, but here are some others: Robert Schultz spoke on "Law and Gospel in Spiritual Care." Bishop Marcus Lohrmann asked "What is the Church For?" Michael Hoy critiqued "America" from a theological perspective, Carolyn Schneider crossed "Christian Zionism and the Christ of the Cross." Fred Niedner shared "How the Distinction of Law and Gospel Shapes My Preaching." Jerome Burce asked, "Who is my Neighbor?" Steve Albertin analyzed "The Congregational Leader: Gospel Shaping the Congregation." Todd Murken focused on "The Future of the Church." All proceedings will be made available on a CD and may be purchased for \$25; conference attendees will receive them free.

Most regretfully, we have no pictures of the marvelous Eucharist service held Tuesday evening. We were all inspired and nourished by Fred Niedner's sermon on the living fishnet, an image I'll never forget (posted on the web as Thursday Theology #451: <http://www.crossings.org/thursday/Thur020107.htm>). Joan and Bob Bergt's organ and violin music soared, lifting our hearts, minds and souls in joyful worship.

So, you say, sounds like such a grand event, we ought to repeat it! Funny you should say that.... Stay tuned.

Cathy Lessmann

Printing and mailing this quarterly is paid for by your gifts, thank you. If you are a reader but not yet a giver, we can wait. When you are ready to be both, we won't object.