



C is for *Crossroads of America*,

that is to say, Indiana, and Indianapolis in particular. (Is it true that there are more different Interstate highways in our city than in any other city in America? I-65, I-69, I-70, I-74, plus three-digit extensions thereof . . .

The Speaker of the House said our state legislature will “beef up” transportation funding. “We can’t be the Crossroads of America and not invest in highways and bridges.” I was reading this in an article about proposed road projects during the week I was preparing to preach about Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, and an analogy caught my eye. I heard Jesus persistently driving the conversation down, from the superficial level where the devil was at home, to a fundamental, “god-ological,” level.

So, too, in the “newspapericope,” I was brought to reflect on a three-level analysis of the problem. Not an exact parallel to our three-level “Crossings-style” analysis of pericopes, but not unrelated, either. Let’s see.

R is for *Roads*.

“Nobody likes to drive on a bumpy road,” quoth one wise legislator. I’m with you there! I am so glad Camelback Drive was repaved shortly after we moved into our house. Horrible, isn’t it, when a road comes to pieces and then is patched and re-patched and re-patched.

At this level of analysis, we have what Ephesians might refer to as an enemy “of flesh and blood” against which we are contending. Get some asphalt into a truck and bring it over and repair it, for crying out loud. Talk doesn’t fix roads. It is complicated, yes, and I can appreciate that there is an art to it. Way back in 1967 I got to see a stretch of asphalt road in Ottawa, Canada, which was then forty years old and had never been patched, because it had been so scientifically planned. On the other extreme, at Lake Kopyago in the Hela Province of Papua New Guinea I drove my Suzuki jeep on roads made entirely with hand tools. Large rocks were broken up by building fires next to them until they fractured; the women carried away the broken bits in string bags on their heads. I appreciate roads, and I appreciate the work that goes into making them good. Thank God for them.

O is for *Other People*.

That article in the Indianapolis Star didn’t stay long at the superficial level of bumpy roads. It turns out there is a still deeper problem inextricably linked to it. The problem of other people. As in Sartre (in *No Exit*), “Hell is other people.” Turns out the real problem in the legislature is the political one. We have to figure out how to solve the problem of how to pay for the road projects, and this involves taking money from people, and they don’t really like that, mostly. A few times the article touches on the hatred people bear for certain taxes. Auto-excise tax. Income tax. If everyone loved to pay taxes, it seems, fixing roads would

not be difficult at all. There's plenty of asphalt, and there are plenty of trucks, and lots of people want work. So what's the problem? Other people. How will you get the people of Fort Wayne to pay for a bridge over the Ohio River, to make up an example. Lawmakers will have to find the "right balance," the just way to spread the pain over the population so the roads can get paved. People who know nothing about fixing roads might be very good at fixing the feelings of people so the job can get done.

S is for Something There Is That Doesn't Love a Road.

You remember Frost's "Mending Wall"?

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast. . . . The
gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them
made, But at spring mending-time we find them
there.*

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Down deep, below the surface-ological and politico-logical problematics, lies what we are really up against in the first place: "something." Something that doesn't love . . . anything we build. Something that creates the difficulty in the first place. Something which will last longer than anything we build. Let's just call it Mother Nature, for now anyway.

If we don't recognize what we are really up against, if we do not know about earth and sun and water, then all our efforts at building and repairing our roads and bridges will be frustrated. Robert Frost (ooh, is it "frost" that "does not love a wall"?) unifies and personifies the force against which we contend, albeit he doesn't go so far as to say "Someone."

I hope you have followed me, and are willing to see that addressing the problem of "road projects" necessitates understanding all three of these levels, even though it is actually only the first and second that we can do anything about. We're not going to veto Murphy's Law or withdraw our support for entropy any time soon. We'd better face the fact that we are dealing with something bigger than us, when we get down to the bottom.

S is for Spiritual Forces of Evil.

Ephesians 6:12: "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." I think we are here being warned that, try as we might to deal by ourselves with enemies of blood and flesh (or ice and storm), we are way out of our depth trying to **save** ourselves. Out in the wilderness with the devil, we might succumb to such innocuous blandishments as "Hey, aren't you hungry? Hadn't you better make some bread?" because we might not notice the demonic undertone; and the undertow of self-concern could lead to us losing our lives when all we were trying to do was save ourselves. (And who could blame us if we tried to save ourselves? See Mk 8:35; but see Mk 15:31.)

Our struggle is not against something simple or superficial, something surface-ological; nor merely is the difficulty merely politico-logical; it is deeper.

Seminar morning sessions were dedicated to teaching and practicing the Crossings six-step method. The afternoon was spent applying it to a real-life situation, in this case, the human issues in the movie *Carnage*.

Additional, helpful highlights and insights came from: Chris Repp: "How I learned to quit worrying and love the matrix;" Steve Albertin: "It can't be THAT bad!;" Jerome Burce: "Crossing the Gospel of Luke;" Martin Lessmann: "How to tell the difference between a crappy sermon and a good one;" Marcus Felde: "Using the law/gospel approach in sermon writing."



Our struggle (the opening words of Bonhoeffer's **Discipleship**, by the way: "*Unser Kampf heute geht um die teure Gnade*"—a nifty stick-in-the eye of whoever authored that bestseller, *Mein Kampf*), our struggle is not against something people can handle. It is against something we cannot overcome. "Most Merciful God, we confess that we are captive to sin and **cannot** free ourselves." Sound familiar?

I** is for **It Can't Be THAT Bad!

The recent Crossings Seminar in Belleville harped on "Good News We Don't Want to Hear." Over and over, we practiced driving the conversation down to the level of what we term, rather ominously I think, "D3," the ultimate diagnosis, the eternal problem. Steve Albertin titled his lecture "It Can't Be THAT Bad! Why God's Deadly Diagnosis of Our Human Condition Matters." We were reminded that, although the world wants to believe it can handle its own problems (if people would just smarten up a bit), we are up against something more serious even than ignorance, if we are honest. "It" really is that bad." To quote John Maynard Keynes, who suggested a certain way to fix monetary problems, "In the long run, we are all dead." In the long run, the nicest highways, even the one in Ottawa, are going to come apart. Best-laid plans and all that. The wages of sin and all that. This is a stubborn reality which theology and the church ignore at our peril. Roads which are laid over this swamp will only be drivable a short while.

Our seminar was drenched in that concern, and participants from all over—even Singapore—exercised our exegetical and cultural-analytical acumen contending against shallower analysis.

Lent being a time for "selves-examination, we should follow our Lord's lead and recognize how implicated God is in all our life. Not just looking for things we can do (Bake bread! Fill pothole!), but testing the connection to the God Jesus thrice invoked against the devil.

N** is for **Not Alone.

"One does not live by bread alone." We live, Jesus says, **not alone** by bread. Not merely, not simply by bread. It's not as easy as "eat and be satisfied." To live is more than that. And by "more," Jesus doesn't mean circuses. (Roman poet Juvenal originated the phrase "bread and circuses." In Spain, it's "*pan et toros*," bread and bullfights.) I wonder why Luke doesn't have the second half of Jesus' saying. In Matthew, it's "One does not live by bread alone, **but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**" (I like the NIV's rendering of the preposition: we do not live **on** bread alone, but **on** every word that comes from the mouth of God.) We live on words. We live on words that come from the mouth of God!

Not, most emphatically **not** merely on bread. Or computer games. Or coffee. Or baseball. Or any of the

ephemera which our descendants will rejoice in a thousand years from now. We don't live on those. We live on words. Not just any old words. Words that come from the mouth of God. Absent those life-giving words, the people perish. Without Holy Spirit in our lungs, we expire. One does **not** live by bread **alone**.

G is for Good News.

The Good News is not the first thing we hear when we get down to the level where our analysis of selves takes us. Bad news is louder. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Surely this verse should be read at the dedication ceremony for a new highway?) But Good News there is! We do not contend against sin and death alone. The Good News is that some words have "come out of the mouth of God," to the effect that we shall not die, but live. Equally as good as the bad news is bad, the Gospel of Jesus Christ works. It works. Publicly, privately, now and forever, it works to give life where life is being taken away; light where people stumble in darkness; wholeness where people are going to pieces; unity where people are coming apart; holiness where people are abjectly sinful. Gospel works.

It's not there in that temptation pericope, but it is hinted at. If we do not live by bread alone, we shall live by the words Jesus gives us, which come out of the mouth of God—accompanied by bread and wine, so we don't forget that we also need healing at the other two levels. If we are not to bow down and worship anyone but God, well, let us bow down and worship God in Jesus, Very God of Very God. If we are not to put God to the test, well, let us pay close attention when God **tests himself** on the cross, and let us notice that God does

not fail the test but triumphs over sin and death as handily as Jesus did over the devil in the wilderness.

Our Good News is not the Best News in the world unless it has squared off against the Worst News in the world and won.

S is for Someone.

Not "Something," as in Frost's "Mending Wall," but "Someone."

Someone there is who does not love a wall, but loves a road. Hates it when people do wrong, loves to make us right. Someone there is, not just thunder or whirlwind or frost or enemy of flesh and blood, who has given himself for us. Someone there is. Someone is there. Someone meets us at the bottom, who will conduct us back to the surface.

Where we can commence building roads and bridges, taking care of business, helping people learn to make common cause with one another. There are indeed enemies of flesh and blood—often they are ourselves—and we can be peacemakers, who have overcome in Christ. I refer to John's letter: "I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

The word abiding in us makes us alive, gives us hope and purpose, and capacitates us for great and good things.

Among which, we pray, will be your supporting The Crossings Community in our mission to keep forcing the analysis down, down to where Christ has crossed the road to give us Life.

Marcus Felde



A mix of clergy and lay worked together crossing sample gospel texts. Below, Steven Kuhl (right, Crossings president) chats with Steve Albertin.

