



C is for “Causeway”

That’s Pastor Marcus Felde’s way of thinking about what Crossings helps to do—not only for himself, but for others. Marcus has been doing his own causeway-crossings for over thirty years as a pastor—literally bridging to the other side of the world. A graduate of Seminex in 1975, he served as a missionary in Papua New Guinea from 1975 to 1982 and again from 1990 to 1996. And in all his life’s causeways, he’s also gone on to earn a D.Min. from Seminex and a Ph.D. in Theology from the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.

We are privileged to have Reverend Dr. Felde as one of our breakout session leaders at the forthcoming Crossings Conference (see page 6). That’s part of the reason we asked him to share some of his reflections with us in this newsletter.

Nowadays, Pr. Felde’s causeways have led him to pastor Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, and to be a loving husband to his wife Christine, a father of four grown children, and a grandfather to two.

It’s perhaps his father-like care (like another Father’s care) that leads him to share with us a story of a man he once knew, “From Fatherless to Fat Man” or “Crossing the Mountain”.

michael hoy

R is for (Loving, Hopeful) “Response,” along the Causeway-Crossing

If, as Aristotle once noted, “All knowledge is the knowledge of cause,” well, here is something worth knowing. The Crossings Windowframe. (You may know it by another name. “Six-step Crossings Methodology,” “the Crossings Matrix,” “Bob and Ed’s Digestive Aid for the Ardent Bibliophage,” etc.) I call it a windowframe both because it looks like one and because it helps us frame Scripture in a way that helps us see clearly. Even my nickname for the method does not point out that the purpose of the method, like the purpose of God, and like the season of Lent, is to get people “across.”

Lent is a causeway, not a bridge. We might prefer a bridge. But this bridge is so long it must be a causeway. (Note to the persnickety: Forget the *real* etymology of causeway—I’m making one up.)

Easter is too far from Ash Wednesday. I can’t wait for it to get here.

I happened into a clearing on the north side of a mountain, late one afternoon in the “less rainy” season of 1978. (If you do Google Earth, you might find the place at approximately 5 degrees 8 minutes 11.75 seconds South, 142 degrees 28 minutes 36.50 seconds E.)

We had been looking for people, in an area that was sparsely populated. But on this day, we had been finding no one at home, even when we did find homes. We were from Lake Kapiago, an American missionary and some Duna missionaries walking in the Hewa area in Papua New Guinea.

Finally, in this clearing, we did find people. Lots of people. They were gathered with a purpose. A young lad was dying in this house. He had been horribly burned on the back of his legs and his buttocks, having backed into the household fire while asleep. He had been lying there a couple days, and they expected him to die in another day or so.

My Western solve-all kicked in; I proposed that we do our utmost to get this boy where he could receive medical help. Perhaps he could be saved.

I was mystified at the desultory response. Actually, it would be a daunting task to carry him on an improvised stretcher from this clearing to the health center at Lake Kapiago. It would take as much as ten hours of carrying. Realistically, they told me he would probably die on the way over, and they would just have to carry his dead body back home. A waste of effort.

I asked which of the men was the boy's father. The answer explained a lot. He had no father. No one with an inalienable claim on the boy, or an unavoidable responsibility for him. No father.

I made my strongest case, begged them to think it over and give it a try, and then we left. They had refused us hospitality—there was no place for us to sleep even in this big house, since so many were assembled to consume the feast which would ensue upon his death. (The stack of bananas and pandanus was growing as we stood there.)

I was glad the next day to run into them carrying the boy on the stretcher. I mopped the boy's strained face, and prayed for them as they carried on. They would have to carry him across a sixty-foot vine bridge, and climb a 5,000 foot mountain to make it.

O is for "Oh, Yes!" (whenever, wherever God's "yes" happens)

Cross eighteen years. Christine and I had the luxury of revisiting a seminary in the Enga Province where we had once worked. Talking with a Hewa student at the seminary, I happened to mention that I had never heard the end of the story. Did the boy survive?

Oh, yes! Joyfully, "He's a fat man with four children!"

From fatherless to a father. What a crossing over.

Christine enjoyed a second experience, much like that one, only a few months ago. She was touring Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital in St. Louis with our daughter Kara, who is a new nurse there after graduating from Valparaiso College of Nursing last year. Back in 1985, the year she was born, Kara had spent months in Riley Children's Hospital here in Indianapolis as a heart patient. Now, Christine got a lump in her throat as she saw a whiteboard with room numbers and patients' and nurses' names on it—only this time, Kara's name was not in the "patient" column but in the "nurse" column.

What a crossing over.

We think Lent is long. (At least, as a pastor, I do!) But the causeway we travel is a lot longer than that. Thesis 1 of Luther's 95 Theses says that repentance is a lifelong thing. But we are going in a good direction on that causeway, away from the darkness into the light. Away from death, into life.

SS is for "Servant's Suggestion" (Servant Felde's take on the Windowframe of Crossings)

When I work with the "crossings paradigm" to "program the pericopes" (old language), I am conscious of how close the "prognosis" column is to the "diagnosis" column. That's just to save paper. Actually, I think our whole life is between those columns. Which is, I suppose, another way of saying that our whole life is lived in both columns. But for those of

us who are in Christ, there is no question any longer that, no matter how many times we hear “You are dust,” we hear one **more** time “You are not dust!” *Vive la difference!* Lent is a causeway from Ash Wednesday to Easter. We know the Way, and we know the Cause.

I love the Crossings Windowframe. Six panes arranged in two vertical columns, a template on which one may inscribe one’s theological interpretation of Scriptures in a way which takes very seriously the Point Of It All: our **crossing** from death to life, from darkness to light, from no people to a people, from away to home, on the Way which is Christ Jesus our Lord.

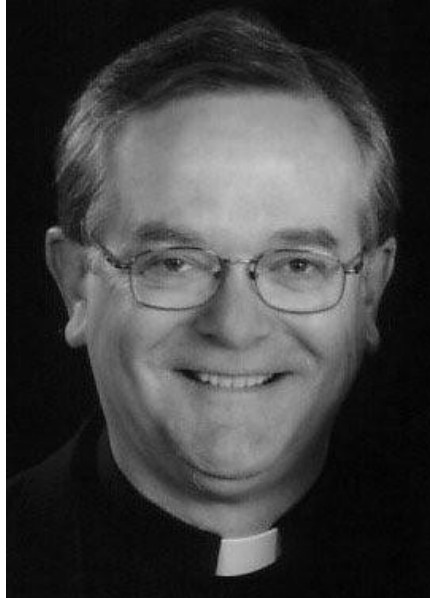
May I suggest yet another way of looking at the Windowframe. Think of it as elucidating three causes.

Cause 1: Our “**cause**,” as servants of the Word, is the pain of the world. Just as juvenile diabetes or drunk driving might be someone’s “cause,” our cause is all that and more. God so loved the world. The world is God’s cause, so to speak. Luther-like interpretation of Scripture has a cause whose scope is broad and deep, extending all the way down to the basement where the problem is fundamentally (express it how you will) our not belonging to the One we belong to. Represent this “cause” with an arrow pointing down the left hand column, from the top pane to the bottom pane. (Apologies to anyone who is not yet familiar with the Windowframe. Find a way.)

Cause 2: To use the word another way, God is the **cause** of our salvation, the one who moves us from the left to the right, from death to life. God does this through his Son, the Word, crucified and risen for our salvation. The Crossings Grid requires us to avoid the quick bridge from presenting symptom to improved behavior; also to avoid the longer bridge from a deformed heart to a well-formed heart; and to go all the way down to where the root problem is. (Take the **causeway**.) Represent “cause” in this sense by an arrow from the bottom left pane to the

bottom right pane; at the bottom level because that is where the action is.

Cause 3: In a third sense of the word “ ‘cause” (and I need to put that apostrophe there), we live and love ‘**cause** of what God has done in Christ. The outcome (upcome?) of salvation is that we live lives of love to the glory of God. Represent this “ ‘cause” by an arrow that goes up the three right panes.



Causeway Cross-er

There were three crosses, as well—if you will allow me an allegorology. The thief who scoffed perished. Down arrow. The thief who believed received eternal life. Up arrow. On the cross in between was the way between the alternatives. Arrow right.

So much for looking at the Windowframe. But we do not admire the window so much as what we see through the window.

Enjoy Lent. Love that cause-way. Celebrate the evidence you encounter of people moving to the other side, one way or another, as God gives his people life. The fat man. The nurse. Yourself. Easter will be here soon enough.

marcus felde

I-N is for (What’s Got) “***Into Nicodemus***” (and others)? ***The Promise, that’s What!***

What, to us, is Lent?

Answer: The Promise of Jesus Christ our Lord—to be trusted, to be enjoyed.

John’s Gospel, in series A of the Lectionary, gives us four vignettes of those to whom the Promise is given, trusted, and enjoyed.

Take Nicodemus, for starters (John 3). He couldn’t, for the life of him, understand what all this being “born again” is all about. The Promise, which he himself admitted was impossible to obtain, is nonetheless lifted up before him in the Son of Man crucified, “so

that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.” Note it comes by faith—“believing in him.” Nicodemus would come to believe that lifting up, and enjoy how much that Promise frees even him to break ranks with his fellow staunch, legalistic Council members, precisely for so embracing the Promise. Count it all joy.

The well-woman (John 4) had only her shame to hold on to, until Jesus comes to her as the Promise of living water. He shares our identity so much as to be downright tired and thirsty (even more-so on the cross). Yet he not only sees this foreigner woman with a past, he converses with her. And in his conversation, he elicits her to look at the story of her shame—not to embarrass her, but to so Promise her that there is no longer need to hide it, to conceal it, but to see it through, with Him. She can trust that all of that shame is no longer what dominates her life. With that Promise, she bears testimony to one and all that they, too, might come to this well-ness of living water. And as they drink, they too testify that “we have [also] heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.” Sounds like joy to me.

Like the others, the man who was blind (John 9) gets the Promise without even asking for it. Note how Jesus with his own disciples keeps the focus on the Promise, not on sin. That is to be overcome. The man’s eyes are washed and he is gifted with sight. And for the better part of his trial that would then follow, that would be his testimony. You can hear his joy in the sharing; in fact, that joy stands in marked contrast to the controlling fear of the authorities, the same controlling fear that seems to have a hold on the man’s own family. But even through persecution and eviction for his confessing, the man has the joy of trusting the Promise.

Then there is Martha (John 11), who in many ways is like her brother Lazarus; she cannot see past the grave. The Promise comes to the grave site, but for her it is already too late. Twice Jesus speaks to her about trusting him and his Promise of resurrection from the dead. And when this Promise would come to fruition for Lazarus, it is this same Jesus who commands that all that would hold people in bondage to death be unbound. In her truest moments of faith, Martha would know its Easter-ing joy: “Yes, Lord; I

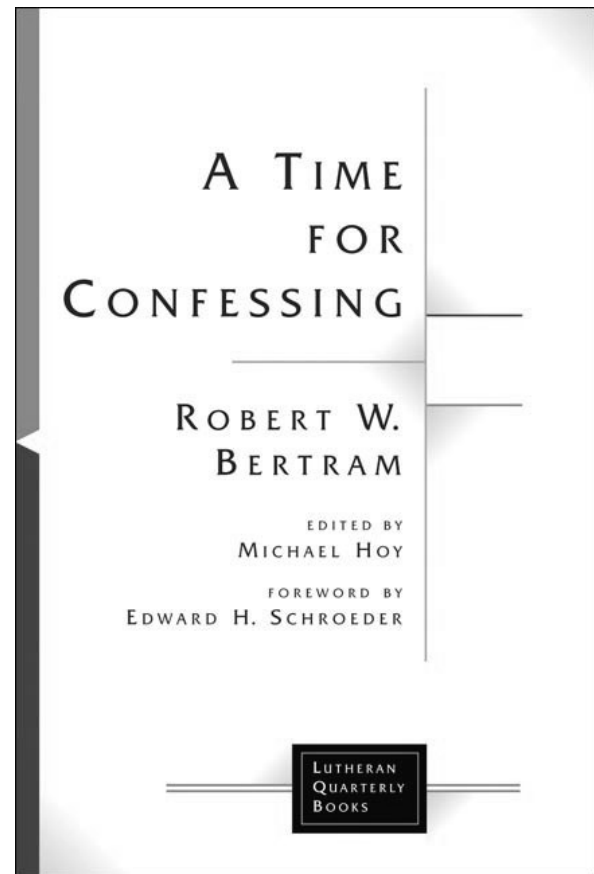
believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

This Promise is Lent. There is repentance, to be sure. But repentance is more like turning around to the joy of Jesus, our Promise. This same Jesus who carries his cross, and with whom we journey these forty days, leads us beyond our cluelessness, our shame, our blindness, and the grim hold death has on us.

Jesus is to be trusted, and to be enjoyed.

Easter will make that abundantly radiant.

mhoy



G-S is for “Gospel Sharing,” Confessing-Style

This March will mark the fifth year that dear friend, colleague, and mentor Bob Bertram made his final Crossing from death to life. Here, too, in Bob was a gift “lent” to us, full of the Promise which he trusted and enjoyed.

It is perhaps fitting that we may mark this time of remembrance with the celebration of his promising book that has just been released by Eerdmans Press, **A Time for Confessing**. You'll want to get your hands on a copy, and if you're coming to the Crossings Conference in October, you'll be sure to get one.



Author Robert (Bob) Bertram, seated center, a few months before his death. Michael Hoy, editor of the book is standing right. Ed Schroeder, writer of the Foreword, is seated left. Also shown are Pr. Ron Neustadt (a close friend from Belleville, IL) and Cathy Lessmann, Crossings Secretary.

Confessing the Gospel is an ongoing work. Such confessing, as each of the stories of confessors in Bob's book bears out, is first to the church, even the religious authorities and those in power and control, who don't seem to get it—it being the Promise, to be trusted and enjoyed.

Nowadays it seems to have become fashionable to challenge all authority, including the authority of bishops and pastors. One of Bertram's insights in his book, for example, challenges the common feeling among many that if we could just get the right leader, all things would fall into place. This is apropos in a time of civil unrest in America, where political campaigns are being waged, often hot and heavy. But it is also true in the mindset of many in the parish, thinking that what we need is "just the right pastor." On the contrary, Bertram points out—

the problem is not in leadership; the problem is in follower-ship. We are unwilling to let Jesus and his Holy-ing Spirit truly lead.

Instead, what seems to be holding the reins on the church's life and direction (not to mention its imagination) is a sense that the church is here to satisfy personal consumerist needs in entertainment, programs and events, or perhaps chaplaincy services-for-hire, often replete with corporate thinking. Even the church's press can sometimes belie the truth of the gospel. To make matters worse, many a church leader has bowed to this pressure, compromising the pastoral office. No wonder thirty percent of the general public has no use for the church!

Still, the church is for-the-mission (*promissio*) of the gospel of Christ. And faithful confessing will take the stand and faithfully proclaim the church's message of the good news.

Whoever said confessing is easy? It is mortifying. You get tuned out sometimes for speaking the Promise. Consider the stories of the Johannine persons above. But there is the joy of the One we confess, and the freedom of his Promise.

Bob often had a relish for that. Whenever he gave a gift, he would speak or write the single word, "Enjoy!"

He's given us another one in his recent publication, and just in time for confessing.

Enjoy!

michael hoy

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.

**Who Do You Say "I AM":
Getting Honest About God Today**

*Why Luther's distinction of Law and
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