

CROSSINGS

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Credo where credo is due.

The 6th International Conference of the Crossings Community gathered in January under the banner “Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of the Christian.” If you did not have the pleasure of joining us, you can at least see the papers on our website, www.crossings.org/conference/papers/2016/, and a summary in our blog dated February 4, 2016: <http://www.crossings.org/thursday>. I will not try to distill the proceedings into a newsletter, but may I throw a few little sticks on the fire?

Let me begin by juxtaposing remarks by Martin Luther and Jerry Burce (our keynoter). Martin said “Now where there is unwillingness, there can never be a good work. For what is not done willingly is not good, but only seems to be good.”¹ Jerry said “The Holy Spirit equals the immediate presence and power of God enabling a person or persons to do things that otherwise cannot be done.”

Flash back to the Third Sunday in Lent this year, when you heard the parable from Luke 15 in which a young man absconds with half his family’s wealth, ruins himself, comes to himself, returns home, and is overcome by his father’s mercy.

What this parable never mentions, yet what it is all about, is the work of the Holy Spirit in those who belong to the Kingdom of God.

You can see this if you just imagine the first actual work day after the “fatted calf” was consumed. Son 1 gets up early, as always, to work on the ranch doing whatever his father tells him to do. But as he saddles up to go fix fences or whatever, Son 2 is also there because Dad asked him to help his brother today. Work with him.

Things are different than they used to be.

Back in the first era, Son 1 had been the hard worker and Son 2 had been the dawdler. Son 2 never was into the work, he was the playboy of the family. Did what it took to get by, but took long lunch breaks, until he could get his loot and scoot. So during this era Son 1 kept everything going, did whatever needed doing, took up the slack, whatever. Both sons lived their lives and did whatever they did under the umbrella of their father’s love for them.

During the second era, Son 1 was the only one around. Son 2 was gone and never heard from. Son 1 did his work as faithfully and as hard as ever. No partying for him, he was just trying to do the right thing as best he could. What a fine and loyal son, living where he belonged—under the umbrella of his father’s love and generosity. A good man, neighbors used to observe, unlike his brother. Funny how two boys raised the same . . . and all that.

During the third era, that is today, Son 1 and Son 2 head out to work together, sharing assignments. Doing concrete tasks, mostly humdrum, taking care of the family business, living still within the same

¹ “A Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, The Holy Mass,” Luther’s Works (American Edition), vol. 35, p. 79.



*The 2016 Conference entitled **Law, Gospel, and the Holy Spirit: Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of the Christian** featured many provocative speakers, only a few shown here. Above Jerry Burce delivers the keynote address. Above right is Jill Baumgaertner. Below her is Steve Turnbull who spoke of the Holy Spirit's work of re-humanization. Other speakers were Amy Schiffrin, Ed Schroeder, Marcus Felde, Steve Kuhl, Toppo Takamura, Martin Lohrmann, Arndt Braaten, Rob Saler & Gary Teske. To the right are two special guests from Singapore, Pastors Martin Yee and Richard Chiue.*



love of their father, who always *had* said “all that I have is yours.” But there is now an invisible difference between Son 1 and Son 2 as they dig fence posts or whatever. Son 1 is probably better at everything, to tell the truth. After all, he has years of experience. The difference in expertise shows, but another difference does not.

But we say confidently that with son 2 something else, something new is at work. Let’s go ahead and label it “the Holy Spirit.” While Son 1 is performing the same “good works” as Son 2, and maybe even better works, we know the *spirit* in which Son 1 (the elder) is doing whatever he does. It is the grudging obedience spirit of “All these years I have done whatever you asked me, and you have not even given me a kid to eat with my friends, and I’ll be damned if I’m going to share the fatted calf feast you have prepared for this whoremonger to eat, but I’ll show you—I’ll still be the better son.” This is the spirit of duty uncoupled from freedom and joy.

For Son 2, however, the digging of holes and roping of calves express thanks to the father who has redeemed him from humiliation and death.

To the eyes of the public, Son 1 is the better son. How can Jesus tell a story which leads us to believe

that it is Son 2 whose works are now pleasing to God?

How?

The same way Jesus could say about the two men who went up to the temple to pray in Luke 18 that the second man (who prayed “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner”) and *not* the first one (who prayed “I thank you, God, that I am better than others”) went home justified. Made right. Fixed.

Before the Luke 15 parable started, during that first era on the farm, it seemed no one was ever going to get it right. Son 1’s faith in himself (“I can be good”) and Son 2’s confidence in money (“I can be happy”) got in the way of their realizing the truth about themselves and their father and enjoying joy and peace. One knew no freedom (“I have done what I had to”), the other knew no control (“I have done what I delighted to do”). Neither knew shalom, or life in its fullness.

Neither had prospects, either.

Somehow, and I don’t want to turn the parable into an allegory, so I shall not discuss what it means (for example) that Son 2 “came to himself”; somehow *God* worked on Son 2 to give him grace to do what

had heretofore been impossible for either brother: to *be* good and to *do* good. The Holy Spirit created a new heart within him so that whatever proceeded from him out there on the back 40, flubs and all, was the work of God and was pleasing to God because it proceeded from a heart filled with thanks to the Father for the new life he had because and only because (if I may insert Easter era lingo) the light of the glory of God had been revealed to him in the face of Jesus Christ.(2 Cor 4:6) Which is to say, it proceeded from faith.

We believe in the Holy Spirit and we *say* we believe in the Holy Spirit because even though God's work is harder to pinpoint when we are talking about things we ourselves do, we must give *credo* where *credo* is due. We believe that the things we do which are good because they spring from our own cleansed and reborn hearts are in fact the works of God. They are the work of the Holy Spirit. To talk about God and not to acknowledge that this, too, is God present and working, would be to confess only part of God.

Credo where *credo* is due.

That bright light shining in the heart of Son 2 when he saw his father running towards him, that fire burning in his heart when his father embraced him with tears streaming down his cheeks, that was a quintessentially God as God-in-creation and God-on-the-cross.

Therefore we confess:

Not only do I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth; but I also believe in Jesus Christ his Son, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius

Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead; and I even believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Marcus Felde



Worship at the conference with Marcus Felde presiding and Lori Cornell preaching.

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