

CROSSING THE GREAT COMMISSION IN A PLURALISTIC AGE

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1.

The “Great Commission” in today’s discussion refers of course to the commissioning of the Eleven recounted in Matthew 28:18-20.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Especially since the beginnings of the modern missionary movement, this text has been cited as the post-Easter Lord’s command to engage in mission. Catholics may have been the first modern missionaries, but Lutherans from Halle, who went in 1705 to the then-Danish colony of Tranquebar (modern Tharangambadi in Tamil Nadu State) in India were among the first Protestants to engage in what would become the modern missionary movement. In his magisterial history of Christianity in India, Robert Frykenberg notes that they were drawn there by the flow of information on the high culture, religion, and philosophy of India that was

coming to Europe and becoming part of the growing body of knowledge that Denmark's and Germany's educated elites were beginning to absorb.¹ Out of that flow back to Europe came both the spur for Protestants to go into mission and the beginnings of the study of the history of religions that would lead to the intense uneasiness of today's American culture about mission.

It is simply a fact of history that the churches began to send missionaries to save pagans from the fires of hell. Why? Because of a number of Johannine, Pauline and other texts epitomized in the Lucan text of Acts 4:12, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Because the Western history of interaction from the 8th to the 18th centuries with Islam had largely been one of warfare, sometimes initiated by Muslims, sometimes by Christians, the "no other name" text came to be central to the urgency with which the Great Commission was interpreted. Linked in the modern era to European assumptions of cultural superiority and feeling it was their right to rule Africans, Asians, and Native Americans, the Great Commission is problematic in our day. It must also be admitted that, with the exception of a few historical figures like St Francis of Assisi (1181 or 82 – 1226), and Raymond Lull (c. 1232 – c. 1315), until the Enlightenment and the advent of a growing appreciation for non-Christian religions on the part of figures such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81), the son of a Lutheran clergyman, few Christians in the West could think of the followers of "other" religious traditions as anything but "pagans" or "infidels."

¹ Robert Erik Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 142-44.

Today we reap the results of that labeling. Christian theology until the middle of the 20th century scarcely tried to develop ideas about Christian identity that did not so emphasize the New Testament's many texts about salvation "only" in Christ as to make Christianity absolutely superior to other traditions. On a parallel track, the science and history of religion was producing anthologies and interpretations of these same religions that showed them to be repositories of wisdom. We now have had several generations of educated young people pass through basic courses in the sociology, psychology, and history of other traditions as to make the Christian claim of salvation being granted only in the name of Jesus seem quaint remnants of a bygone day when European Christian culture was the gold standard.

This, I suggest, is responsible for many Christians today finding the Great Commission a source of confusion, and in many cases, the reason they have left the church or, if remaining within it, do so mainly for social reasons. And because they cannot take the Great Commission seriously, neither can they take seriously other central aspects of the New Testament's claim that Jesus is much more than a prophet or teacher, for the Great Commission makes no sense outside the New Testament claim that Jesus is the savior of all peoples.

One of the paradoxical results of the missionary movement that initiated the "World Christianity" that we celebrate today is that it began during the era of colonial expansion in the 15th century with Portuguese ships sailing down the west coast of Africa and persisted in an Enlightenment that at first thought Christianity was an integral aspect of what made Western culture superior. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the assumption that Christianity and Europe were coterminous was gone. An important part of the Enlightenment project, as we all know, is that it was instrumental in creating the world of universities, science, and technology. Theology once had a place in those universities, and in some

European universities still does, but university faculties of theology and divinity schools on the campuses of great universities like Chicago, Harvard, and Yale exist for the most part today in a world where every school is in a separate silo, a pluriversity, not a place where the unification of knowledge is pursued. And in this pluriversity theology has standing only as a form of religious studies pursued with the methodologies of history and the social sciences. The very structure of the university conveys this to our young just when they are in the final lap of preparing themselves to become productive members of society.

The Enlightenment and Christianity, in essence, developed not only on separate paths, but increasingly in antagonistic ways, especially in Europe. About those separate paths much has and can be said. We will not add to it here. Suffice it to say that Christianity is enjoying incredible growth in Africa and Asia, along with renewal and revitalization in Latin America. In European homelands of both the Enlightenment and world mission, however, Christian faith is beleaguered. While the situation in North America is less negative, it is at best spotty and ambiguous, as countervailing winds blow this way and that.

2.

The best measure of these countervailing trends and their influence on attitudes within the churches, as well as a steady drift, especially of young people, away from identification with formal Christianity is available in several Pew Charitable Trust reports.² For some time, those reports were bad news for the group of churches we can roughly group into those affiliated with the World Council of

² See *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, published by the Pew Charitable Trusts in February 2008. See also the Pew Research Center's "Growth of the Nonreligious," 2 July 2013.

Churches. More recently Catholic and Evangelical Protestant churches that prided themselves in defying those trends have also begun to show signs of losing the allegiance of many of their young in the rise of the so-called “nones,” people who identify with no religious body.

At risk of over-simplification, I want to draw a picture of the broad cultural attitudes that shape the pre-understanding of the “average” American with a Christian background. I think we can agree that this is not a picture of a deep initiation into the reality of Christian spirituality and discipleship. I know the danger of armchair sociologizing, but what I refer to is a picture from thirty-thousand feet about the sort of people who sit in churches such as the Lutheran, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches across the land.

Insofar as I anchor myself in research, I use terminology developed by Christian Smith of Notre Dame University and his colleagues, who have studied patterns of religious belief and behavior among young American Christians.³ I have been warned by Professor Mary Hess of Luther Seminary in St. Paul that some of Smith’s generalizations fall apart when one drills deeply into particular segments of the groups studied or ask different question than Smith et al. ask. Without endorsing every aspect of the research pioneered by Christian Smith and his colleagues, however, I want to suggest that it makes sense in at least a broad way.

In short, it explains that we today experience the results of more than a generation of “let a thousand flowers bloom, ecumenism” that makes it difficult to introduce our youth and young adults to a path of character formation in which a robust

³ Two books by Smith and colleagues can be consulted for a systematic laying out of their case. See Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (2009), with Patricia Snell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and, with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: the Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (2005), with Melinda Lundquist Denton (New York: Oxford, 2005).

Christian identity is integral to their emerging self-identity. That is to say, the faith life of many is what Smith calls “moralistic, therapeutic deism.” In an interview with Tony Jones, he defines those terms as follows:⁴

By “moralistic” I [Christian Smith] mean oriented toward being good and nice, in ways that assert certain moral claims (for example, “You should never have sex with someone you don't really care about.”) in fairly arbitrary ways without their being integrated into any larger, coherent moral tradition.

By “therapeutic” I mean being primarily concerned with one’s own happiness, good feeling, personal comfortability, and emotional wellbeing — in contrast to, say, a focus on glorifying God, learning obedience, or serving others.

Finally, by “deism” I mean a view of God as normally distant and not involved in one's life, except (as qualified by the “therapeutic”) if one has a problem one needs God to solve, one can call on God to fix it and make one feel better. In MTD, in other words, God functions as a combination divine butler and cosmic therapist.

This is a long way from any vital connection with Christian tradition’s notion of discipleship. Yet all of us realize that MTD or something very much like it has a hold on not just the mind of youth but of a large proportion of our congregations. And, to echo an old adage, it has inoculated many so as to make them almost impervious to being infected with the virus of a vigorous Christian identity. I speak of the sort of identity formed in wrestling with the Gospel, much the way Jacob wrestled with a mysterious presence at Peniel and became Israel, the one who has “striven with God and with humans and prevailed” (Genesis 32:28-31.

⁴ Accessed at <http://www.myspace.com/survivorsindiana/blog/284198710> on 2 October 2012.

MTD is far more comforting than the radicality of wrestling with God and deciding to trust the movements of the Spirit that convince a person to throw in his or her lot with the promise of the gospel, trusting Jesus and making fundamental decisions about one's vocation, spouse, and social engagement in the light of trust in the promise of the Gospel.

By default, absent a more serious discipling program, MTD becomes is the operative theology of many Christians as they go about their daily lives in the United States.

But what has this to do with proclaiming Christ in a religiously plural world?

At least the following. In churches such as the Lutheran and the Catholic, we are dealing for the most part with an educated population that has imbibed an outlook that flattens the contours of human religions and cultures.⁵ Our educated parishioners have taken sociology and psychology101, and from such courses have learned everything is relative and that one's religious "preference" is most likely a result of geography and temperament. Among adults, "attending church" is often a habit that lays aside nagging doubts about the big "truth" of the Christian Scriptural and theological tradition to keep up a good moral life or to avoid abandoning friends. Many of their children, who don't have the habit of regular attendance, simply see no reason to give allegiance to a tradition that they don't believe in.

The truth of the matter is that if I had grown up in Tehran, I would in all likelihood be a Muslim who follows Shi'a interpretations of Islam. But because I was born of

⁵ In the case of Catholicism, the pastoral problem is more complex, for a fast-growing percentage of its membership is not the result of the immigration of white ethnics from Ireland, Germany, Czech and Slovak regions, Italians and other Europeans. I refer, of course, to the many Hispanics who have arrived from Latin America and whom the church has had such difficulty ministering to.

an Irish-American Catholic mother raised in a strong Catholic environment, when she met my father, who was at best a nominal Methodist, I am a Catholic. Many of you are Lutherans for similar reasons.

If I had become a science major and got seriously into it up to PhD level, I would likely be hostile to religion, viewing it as an espouser of myths.

We know from studies that the dominant public media tend to treat religion in one of two ways. In the first, it follows Dwight Eisenhower's opinion that, "our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is."⁶ Ike himself moved from being the child of a serious Quaker to a follower of America's then regnant Protestant civil religion. Religion is, in other words, good insofar as it strengthens the nation and Ike was no one if not a loyal American. An historian of American religion will tell us that gradually the Eastern, Protestant establishment admitted Catholics and Jews into the pantheon of civil religion during and after World War II, but the terms of membership were support of the dominant white establishment, just at the time when the civil rights movement began to shake things up. In the 1960s, the women's movement began, and that was quickly followed by the gender revolution.

A second way media deal with the churches is to magnify the voices of churches that favor the groups that the media favor while clucking with alarm when Catholic bishops or Evangelical Protestants did not fall in line on matters like abortion or gay rights. Catholic bishops, as we know, find themselves in a weakened position as the sons and daughters of their white ethnic mainstays develop attitudes that do not differ materially from liberal Protestants. The one exception to that has been

⁶ Eisenhower uttered these words at the Freedoms Foundation, Waldorf-Astoria, New York City, New York on 22 December 1952.

Catholic attitudes toward abortion. And even there, as the hierarchy's credibility has been destroyed by revelations of how they handled the clergy sex abuse scandal, the pro-life movement is lay-led.

3.

We all, of course, know these things. Because you are a Crossings member, indeed, you are probably more troubled by them than many ministers and priests who – unable to figure out a way bring their people deeper –settle for trying to keep peace in the congregation. Sermon preparation for many is an attempt to say something entertaining, non-controversial, and – if possible – inspiring on Sundays or when they're leading a Bible study.

I am no longer in public ministry, but I met many a minister and parish priest during my years at Orbis Books, and I spoke with many hundreds of men and women who were in preparation for ministry and vitally involved in it. As a person who is now in the pew rather than behind the pulpit or at the altar, I've not been able to refrain from forming opinions about what is going on.

Where does one start? With my classmate Patrick Keifert, let's be realistic and say that we have to start where we are – with *this* congregation, with *this* church.⁷ And when I do that, I think the most important place to look at how we carry out the Great Commission is to look at the state of our worship.

Overall, what I want to suggest is that we miss something vital when Christian worship is not celebrated as a congregation's collective, symbolic joining of its members' personal and corporate identity with the paschal mystery of Jesus' death

⁷ Patrick Keifert, *We are Here Now: A New Missional Era* (Eagle, Idaho: Allelon, 2008).

to self, as he gives up his all to God (the parable of Matthew 26:39 and Luke 23:46). Worship that does not breathe the full Trinitarian dimension of the paschal mystery cannot form a people for whom taking the Great Commission seriously is a lifetime goal. The drama of Luke-Acts as a whole is arguably the most explicit argument for this, for in Luke-Acts the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus find their fulfilment in the bestowal of the Spirit, who animates the church to become the Body of Christ in the world.

Catholics and Lutherans have spilled thousands of gallons of ink over how the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is best understood. For our purposes, I would like to leapfrog over those controversies and find common ground in the primitive church's conviction that the church is the *real Body of Christ* and the *Eucharist is the mystical Body*. My battered copy of the Italian translation of Henri de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* tells the story of how that conviction became transposed in later centuries.⁸ In that convoluted process, the church became the mystical body and the Eucharist became the real body, and during it, the Holy Spirit was downgraded from being the divine Person who breathed life into the body to the one who had a somewhat ill-defined role in enabling the priest to consecrate bread and wine. It was, of course, all part of the sad tale of sacerdotalizing the church, a process that the great reformers of the sixteenth century attempted to reverse.

Alas, what the reformers ended up with was a church in which expounding the Word of God became more important than worship being an integrated action in which the Spirit led God's people to be nourished by the Word and move into the Eucharistic act where – joined in the Spirit – they joined themselves mystically with

⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum* (Turin, Italy: Piero Gribaudi Editore, 1968; French original, Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1948; English edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). It has been recently translated into English by Gemma Simonds, CJ; see *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages, Historical Survey* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

Christ, as his death was remembered at the altar, spiritually, an act that brought their daily lives and offered them to God with Christ.

As I read the story of Lamin Sanneh's move from Islam to Protestant Christianity and through a variety of Protestant churches to Catholicism, I was struck by a theme that comes up at several places in his recent book:

Catholicism is all things to all people, unquestionably, but at worship it is simply superlative. *The altar properly overshadows the pulpit, I suppose because the divine self-giving is really the first and last word – and our gratitude the most fitting and acceptable response.* Without that preaching is display and salesmanship. Preaching is for us; worship is only for God.⁹

Three quick words: (1) neither Sanneh nor I seek to speak of the superiority of Catholicism; (2) would that Catholic worship actually lived up everywhere to the ideals that Sanneh describes; and (3) what I seek to do here is say that we need to reclaim the integrated drama of Word and Sacrament, a drama in which preaching is a form of mystagogy that leads worshipers to join at the altar in remembrance of the paschal mystery in the *nunc aeternum* of worship where we say Yes to the promise that is the gospel.

First, to take another run at what I am saying, we come together in liturgy not primarily to hear a sermon but to join ourselves to the historical mystery of Jesus's death and resurrection. Second, the few minutes that the leader of worship can devote to instruction of the congregation cannot be the main source of a congregation's education. The Sunday homily is best understood as "mystagogy," teaching that leads a people to a diagnosis of their situation in the light of the Word

⁹ Lamin Sanneh, *Summoned from the Margin: The Homecoming of an African* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 251.

and an invitation to respond to the mystery of God's being one with us. If people have not been reading Scripture and other good material, praying over it, and grappling with what it means in the context of their family's life, weekly worship will inevitably degenerate into a routine act. Our Baptist and other Evangelical brothers and sisters have something very right in their notion that weekly Bible study is as important as Sunday worship. The Wesleyan Methodist emphasis on a serious Sunday school incarnates that same wisdom.

I think, though, that too few Lutheran, Catholic, or Anglican communities have learned the lesson that a Eucharistic or Communion liturgy is the occasion when a congregation and its individual members join themselves sacramentally to the Christ who has once-for-all (Hebrews 9:12) entered into the sanctuary "with his own blood."

Yes, I know sacrificial language is problematic in our time. Feminist theology in particular casts suspicion on the patriarchal imagery of obedience unto death, seeing in the crucifixion of Jesus – as popularly interpreted – a horrifying glorification of paternal masochism and an inducement to women to acquiesce in a "scapegoat syndrome."¹⁰ I take such criticisms seriously but must confess my inability to consider them ultimately convincing. I have learned much from feminist theologians, especially from my teacher Anne Carr, from the articles of friends such as Susan Ross, and most recently from Elizabeth Johnson's attempts to bring a more wholistic vision of Christian life and thought in a world that is grounded not just in Scripture, but also in a renewed appreciation other religious traditions and ecology.

¹⁰ See for example, Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon, 1973) 71-73, 75.

That said, let me return to my main point. That is to suggest that the distinction between a scripture-based homily within the overall movement of a Eucharistic liturgy is insufficiently understood or stressed. I hope you will forgive me for speaking concretely and from within my Catholic tradition. I do so not because I think it is superior but because I am insufficiently acquainted with Lutheran liturgical theology or practice. You have invited me as a guest, and I am honored to be here, but your guest is a Catholic who has a hunch that both of our traditions need to go deeper into our common roots in both Greek and Latin liturgical origins. We should do so while avoiding the tendency of many to think that ancient liturgical practices should be preferred, simply because they are old. We have much to learn from them, but we cannot avoid the responsibility to worship in ways relevant to our own age.

That said, may I observe that in certain seminaries I know, worship is taught as if a fledgling minister or priest is to be the impresario of ever more creative rituals. This modern notion flies in the face of the reality that the late Joseph Kitagawa repeated several times at lunches we had when I returned to Chicago on business. Speaking of the Catholic liturgical renewal, he said it was being implemented naively. Religion, he said, is one of a people's anchors and should change only when a people's fundamental religious consciousness has changed. The role of a priest is to help a people find unity amidst the swirl of cultural change, not heat things up by introducing controversial changes.

Kitagawa told me at our last lunch that he had left instructions that he wanted to be buried according to the 1927 Anglican Book of Common Prayer with a sermon based on Scripture on our hope for eternal life. "If the Divinity School wants to have a memorial service with eulogies before or after, let them." I could not attend Joe's funeral. I have often wondered if his wishes were respected.

We live in an age when culture is in rapid flux. It is difficult to know, for example, how the debates that rage around gender identity and sexual ethics will turn out. I count myself a feminist and I have gay friends whose following of Christ puts my often tepid discipleship to shame. I also have friends who have dropped out of the church and religion altogether. Others have become Jewish and Buddhist. Others still who feel themselves to be both Buddhist and Christian.

Moreover, I cringe when I hear some Christians use the words of the Great Commission as a call to convert everyone lest they be cast into hell. In my dissertation on the Catholic Church's teaching on "other" religious ways, I came to the conclusion that philosophically and historically, we cannot argue convincingly for the superiority of Christianity. Moreover, the more honest we are, the more we need to confess the ambiguity of every tradition, including our own. I eventually devised a sort of proportion that went as follows:

Just as insights into the age of the universe gained through the study of astronomy and geology led Christians to reinterpret the doctrine of creation, so it is likely that insights from the study of other religions will lead us to reinterpret the doctrine of salvation.

I've added two other such proportions. The first is:

Just as insights from biology, cultural history and gender have led us to understand that patriarchy arose in contingent cultural situations, so we have to dialogue honestly about changes in both religion and society about the respective roles of males and females.

The second is a variation on the above:

These same insights on the seeming plasticity of gender and sexuality necessitate open and honest dialogue about homosexuality and other sexual issues.

Let us be honest, arguments about the value of other religious ways, the challenges of science, and conflicts over sexual ethics and gender have weakened the zeal of churches like the Lutheran and Catholic to carry out the Great Commission. These issues will be with us for the foreseeable future. It is hard to imagine that we will overturn the insights of science into the age of our fourteen or so billion-year universe. Neither will we easily or soon arrive at unanimity about male-female relations or opinions on same-sex relations, not to speak of issues involving transgendered people.

In my opinion, none of these things need to become *articuli stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* if they are handled with humility and respect by all sides. That, however, is something rarer than ideal.

In the meantime, the most honest way to proceed is by moving beyond notions that we can theologically argue people into conformity. Much more in the spirit of the Gospel is a catechesis that is aimed at helping people perform something like the Crossings analysis of their individual, familial, and social situation and bring that to Jesus in prayer. Only when one encounters the Christ whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light (Matthew 11:30) will that person come to him humbly and ask for what is needed.

The modern minister or priest spends years studying scripture, history, and the various branches of theology, but does she apprentice with someone who knows about the art of caring for souls? Does a congregation look for leaders whose

primary interest and talents lie in the balancing act of introducing individuals and groups to both the challenges of the law and the promise of the Gospel?

4.

As nearly as we can understand the religious pre-history of humankind, the world has always been religiously plural. By that I refer to what Joseph Kitagawa calls “a sort of synthesis of what Western convention calls religion, culture, society, and political order.”¹¹ For many thousands of years, of course, such synthetic “wholes” existed in relative independence of one another, inside boundaries marked by seas, riverine systems, language families, and mountain ranges. Many of those groupings were quite small and protected the rituals that united them to life’s forces, “presences,” culture heroes, ancestors, and sometimes gods. Separate as they were, however, there were resemblances and peoples’ borrowed rituals and sometimes myths from one another, and sometimes they paid a rival people to learn the secret of rituals that proved better at guaranteeing rain or the fruitfulness of vineyards, wives, and livestock. On the borderland between such groups, then, exchange begot change.

As cities developed at crossroads where traders met to exchange goods, larger religio-cultural-socio-political groupings came into contact with one another. These cities grew and became the centers of civilizations. Cities grew more powerful as they produced more valuable goods for trade and as their armies were able to extend protection and law over larger areas. In many places (think of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India), smaller groups were brought together under the banner of the respective cities’ rituals, beliefs, and stories.

¹¹ Joseph Kitagawa, *The Quest for Human Unity: A Religious History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 2.

In that process, what Westerners call “religion” and distinguish from realms like commerce, legitimacy of heritable kingships, the use of military force to enforce decrees, political and legal systems that regulate gender, property rights, care of slaves, and so forth were usually merged into a single mass of customs.

I oversimplify greatly when I jump to the great philosopher and historian, Karl Jaspers. His grand thesis is that, in a so-called “axial period” occurring in a number of places from 800 to 200 BC, something happened, which he describes as follows:

Confucius and Lao-tse were living in China, all the schools of Chinese philosophy came into being . . . India produced the Upanishads and Buddha and, like China, ran the whole gamut of philosophical possibilities down to skepticism, to materialism, sophism and nihilism; in Iran Zarathustra taught a challenging view of the world as a struggle between good and evil; in Palestine the prophets made their appearance, from Elijah, by way of Isaiah and Jeremiah to Deutero-Isaiah; Greece witnessed the appearance of Homer.

. . .

What is new about this age, in all three areas of the world, is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He experiences the terror of the world and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void, he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognizing the limits he sets himself the highest goals. He experiences absoluteness in the depths of selfhood and in the lucidity of transcendence.¹²

¹² Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*. Translated by Michael Bulloch. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953, original edition, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, 1949), p.2.

I hasten to add that in Israel the concrete form of Axial change occurs in relation to the conquest by Babylon. The prophets dig deeper into the traditions of Israel and discover there the purpose of the Law as it is so luminously articulated in Deuteronomy 6:4-7):

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

In literary terms Deuteronomy purports to be a recital of God's deeds in choosing Israel, giving Moses to the people to guide them. According to Daniel Block, Deuteronomy "was Jesus' favorite book."¹³ Historically, it is likely to have been composed in the wake of the Babylonian captivity,¹⁴ and shows the Axial age transformation that Israel's prophets are making as they search for the reason why Yahweh has abandoned the Israelite nation. The text we have quoted is, of course, one of the favorites Jesus (Matthew 22: 36-40; Mark 12:30-32) and becomes one of the central themes that characterize the "good news" of the Gospel. God seeks to enter into a love relationship with humankind, a relationship in which humanity gains the courage to trust God completely.

¹³ Daniel Block, *How I love Your Torah, O Lord! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: 2011), p. xvii.

¹⁴ See John W Rogerson, "Deuteronomy," in James D. G. Dunn and John William Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp 150-55.

5.

Life resists neat conclusions. It is a process, and the Crossings methodology is a process of helping men and women come to see themselves and their world through the eyes of God, in a first movement of three stages, diagnosing ourselves and our situation. One then crosses over into a second prognosis movement, also with three stages in which we see how God sees us and offers us God's triune self to heal our broken hearts and become one with Jesus.

As I have come to appreciate the Crossings diagnosis/prognosis dynamic, I have come to appreciate it more and more. What I bring from the liturgical traditions of the ancient, medieval, and modern *ecclesia magna* is only the suggestion that liturgy, especially the Eucharistic liturgy offers a pattern for Christians to move from a confession of who they are and how they try to avoid trusting God to laying themselves on the altar spiritually in and with their brothers and sisters, uniting themselves to God, united with our High Priest Jesus. When this is done, the church truly becomes the Body of Christ, and participates existentially in the life of the Trinity. One brings one's whole life – family, work, faults, joys, concerns – to the altar mystically and partakes of the body and blood of Jesus which makes us his body and blood. Mere teaching is directed to the head. Mystagogy leads the entire person to participate existentially in the Mystery of God making us sons and daughters of Godself, brothers and sisters of one another.